

Report of the Council

THE number of scholars using the Society's Library during the winter months increases every year, as the reputation of our several outstanding collections becomes more widely known. Visitors came to work on newspapers, early printing, local history (especially of the south and west), American literature, hymnology, songbooks, biography, engravings, lithography and graphic arts, directories, and many other specialized collections. Among the minor subjects for which inquiry was made were American cookery, early American plays, colonial currency, trade cards, and political cartoons. These collections were useful primarily because of their comparative completeness.

The addition to the stack, finished a year ago, has filled a long-felt want, and the process of relocating the books has been practically completed. The reclassifying of the books, to group them by subjects instead of adhering to a fixed shelf system, has made great headway, and one entire floor in the new stack has already received about fifteen thousand books, reclassified and recatalogued. This new scheme, long contemplated but always postponed, has been almost entirely engineered by Mr. Shipton, who assigns a certain amount of time each day for the work and has made amazing progress.

The finances of the Society have been considerably improved by the recent receipt of the Henry F. DePuy bequest, amounting to \$170,000. The income from this bequest will obviate the almost certain deficit which the Society would have incurred during the present fiscal year. Henry DePuy died in 1924, after a membership of seven years, and a much longer interest in the Society. He had a

long career in engineering and for sixteen years was connected with the Babcock & Wilcox Company, manufacturers of machinery. For twenty years, after his retirement, he was an enthusiastic collector of Americana, and accumulated one of the choicest collections ever formed in America, which collection was sold at auction in 1919. His will provided a trust for his sister, Miss Ellen DePuy, and upon her death, which occurred last year, the principal of the trust came to this Society. He expressly requested that the corpus of the fund should be preserved and that the income should be expended for the purchase of books in the field of Americana.

Mr. DePuy once told me that his interest in the Society came from his admiration of our aggressiveness and activity in collecting books for the library. Even when we had little income we always managed to buy rare books and to pay for them somehow. He said that we had imagination in collecting, and that instead of buying books in fields which were already covered by the large public and college libraries, we branched out into fields apparently minor at the time, but which we foresaw would be collected in the future. Instances of this, he said, were children's books, almanacs, American fiction, and early imprints. In fact, it was he, more than anyone, who encouraged us to buy extensively in the field of American literature covered by Foley's Bibliography, and he steered many books in our direction. His advice was well founded, since the prices of books in most of these minor fields have more than trebled since his death.

At this point it might be interesting to record how our various collections were developed since the change in the Society's management due to the election of Waldo Lincoln as President in 1907. Before that time the Society, for three-quarters of a century, back to the era of Christopher Columbus Baldwin, had acquired only such books as were presented to it. It is true that the Society had little money,

but even then the income from some of the book funds was not spent. One book fund of \$6500 had increased by 1908 to \$15,000 through the accumulation of interest. The members of that day were more interested in the meetings and the publication of papers than in the development of the library.

When the new régime came into being, some forty-five years ago, the first thought was to develop the collections in which we were already strong. We had an outstanding collection of early newspapers, inherited from Isaiah Thomas. He had the foresight to approach the descendants of early publishers and to purchase several practically complete files of eighteenth-century newspapers. He also preserved most of the miscellaneous issues of newspapers which came to him in exchange as a newspaper publisher or through the correspondence which culminated in his *History of Printing* in 1810. After Thomas's day the collecting of newspapers was rather casual, chiefly the acceptance by the Society of such files as came its way. By 1908 the collection contained about fifteen hundred volumes and portfolios of newspapers dating before 1865. From 1908 on an extensive effort was made to secure all early files, through solicitation from the descendants of early publishers, but chiefly through bidding on every file which was offered for sale by book-dealers or at auction. Today the collection is about four times larger than any other for the period before 1820, and highly representative for the country's newspapers through 1865. After that year we have attempted to preserve only a few, less than thirty of the important newspapers published in the United States, and also all papers published in Worcester. Incidentally, considerable effort was made to obtain the early newspapers of the West Indies, Mexico, and South America. Today the entire collection fills two floors of three book-stacks, covering nearly five miles of continuous shelf space.

The next collection developed after 1908 was that of early American printing before 1820—the books and pamphlets issued during the first one hundred and eighty years of printing in this country. Although extensive research would reveal more exact figures, I would believe that in 1908 the Library possessed about five thousand imprints dating to 1820. These came mostly from Isaiah Thomas who acquired many early imprints and most of the important books of his day, and from the hundreds of pamphlets which Christopher Baldwin obtained from the Thomas Wallcut and other libraries. Volume IV of Evans' *American Bibliography*, published in 1907, credited the Antiquarian Society with only 247 out of the 3200 imprints listed for the years 1765-1773. Yet he took only the titles listed in our 1837 *Catalogue* and must have missed many titles which we then had. Evans did not care so much for location of copies until he reached his volume seven, published in 1912 and covering the years 1786-1789.

Since the year 1908 our collection of pre-1820 imprints has increased to about 55,000, or about two-thirds of the total number printed. Of the imprints issued in the seventeenth century—the incunabula of American printing—the Society has three hundred and fifteen, over one-third of the total number known. In increasing the collection of pre-1820 imprints in the early days we were helped largely by the Pennypacker auction sales in 1908-1909, where we bought most of the imprints offered, and by the purchase in 1909 of the William J. Campbell collection of early Pennsylvania imprints, over one thousand in number. All of these purchases, as well as those of the next few years, were made possible through using the unexpended income of book funds, and through the larger income enjoyed by the Society because of the funds raised by Mr. Lincoln and other officers of the Society between 1908 and 1915.

The next collections to be enlarged were those of genealogy and of local history. In the former field in 1908 the Society owned about 2000 separately printed genealogies. Today the collection numbers about 10,500 genealogies, ranking with the Library of Congress and the New England Historic Genealogical Society. Which of the three is the largest could only be proved by an actual count. The Society has not encouraged genealogical investigation where the researcher was interested only in his own family ancestry, although it realizes that such research is of much entertainment to local visitors. It has sought to make use of this great genealogical collection as an aid to the study of history and biography. The staff, as well as visiting scholars, have used the collection repeatedly in solving problems in bibliography, literature, biography, and political and social history.

Local history has been one of the fastest growing collections in the Library. Forty-five years ago the only field covered was the local history of New England. Today the collection covers the entire country, including all of the States to the Pacific coast. It numbers about 30,000 volumes and, so far as I know, is the most complete national collection existing, although each individual State, in most cases, has its own local history well collected in regional libraries.

Many other collections, such as civil war history, children's books, hymnology, Bibles, almanacs, songbooks, early schoolbooks, bookplates, engravings and lithographs, have been extensively developed during the last forty years, but there is no time here to describe these accumulations. Narratives of Western history and exploration, developed through the gift of the outstanding Donald McKay Frost collection, put the Library in the forefront in this important field. Some day the Society should publish a detailed account of its various collections, while those in the Library

now living can furnish the details of how they were established and increased.

No other collection has shown such a startling increase as American literature. We already had a large proportion of all American books published before 1820, because of our interest in early imprints. For this reason we make a strong showing in F. P. Hill's *American Plays*, which lists all drama by American authors to the year 1830. Of the 347 titles listed in this volume we now have 220. Also in early American poetry we had an extensive collection, as is shown in Oscar Wegelin's *Early American Poetry*, covering poetry to 1820. Of the 1379 titles listed by Wegelin, we have over two-thirds, even though hundreds of broadsides, so often unique, were included. The two outstanding collections represented in the Wegelin bibliography were at Brown University and the American Antiquarian Society, to which libraries his book was dedicated.

But for American literature after 1820, our library was exceedingly deficient in 1908. It was not until 1921 that we realized that, strong as we were in political, economic, religious, and social history, we lacked the original materials for the study of American literature after 1820. We had to turn to Boston and New York libraries for books which students well could have expected us to possess. We had available P. K. Foley's comprehensive *Bibliography of American Authors*, listing the first and notable editions of 311 American authors from 1795 to 1895, of whom 122 were living in 1895, and containing 4995 titles within this period. The library staff then prepared a checklist of 2700 titles representing additions to the Foley list for his authors who continued to live and write for thirty years after the production of his book. Therefore, we could start with a list of 7700 titles to form the basis of a collection of American literature.

Of this vast list of titles we owned in 1921 less than one hundred titles. Today we have about ninety per cent of all the titles represented in Foley. We were aided, in gifts of both books and money, by many who were interested—Henry F. DePuy, Herbert E. Lombard, James B. Wilbur, Henry W. Cunningham, Charles E. Goodspeed, Charles H. Taylor, Emily E. F. Skeel, and Frank B. Bemis. These books, with few exceptions, were not rare and expensive. To build up such a collection meant work rather than money—the perusal of countless sales catalogues, asking for lists from dealers, and writing to living authors and the descendants of authors. Today it is seldom that we find a title missing in the field covered by Foley.

In 1939, with a revised edition in 1948, came another reference work of much value to us, Lyle Wright's *American Fiction*, which listed 2800 titles and editions covering from 1769 to 1850. We acquired through purchase and gift hundreds of books in this field, following the same process by which we had built up our Foley collection. Today we have 1865 Wright titles, with the Yale University Library virtually our only competitor. Now Mr. Wright is planning an additional volume which will list American fiction published from 1851 to 1875. This is an important period, as it will cover the Civil War and the expansion of the West. He will omit juveniles, moral stories for the young, and dime novels, but unlike his earlier volume, he will include only first editions and none of the reprints and numerous later editions.

This is a field in which we have already begun to buy extensively, fortunately with no expense to the Library, since a member of the Society has so far, at a cost of over fifteen hundred dollars, purchased the books for us. There is a limit to such acquisitions, as we already had a good start in having the works of standard authors represented in Foley.

Soon, after a few months of intensive hunting, we will build up the collection so that it will only be a question of filling in occasional gaps.

Attention has often been called to the value of novels as a source of material for serious historical study. Subjects such as the beginnings of the West, American speech, methods of eating and drinking, factory life, the saga of society, sports, sea narratives, the life of the soldier in all wars, and social life in every aspect, make novels of outstanding value for a study of the lives of the people of the United States. They mirror life more intimately than any other form of literature. They provide source material for the historian, the sociologist, the educator, and the philologist. Nor do they have to reach high standards of literary form to be of value. Often the least scholarly writers reveal the most useful information. That novels illustrating American life a century ago have not been used to a greater extent is largely due to their rarity. They have often been sought in our Library, and will receive more study as the collection approaches completeness.

Another bibliographical venture is now under way which should mean much to libraries and collectors. This is the projected Bibliography of American Literature which was started in 1944 under the financial sponsorship of the Lilly Foundation, and the editorial supervision of the Bibliographical Society of America. The object is to provide a scholarly and authoritative bibliography of American literature, listing all of the works of a revised and approved list of authors who have reached a standard generally accepted by critics and literary historians. A committee of five members was appointed by the Bibliographical Society and Jacob Blanck was chosen as editor. After many meetings of the committee, 287 authors were selected in the final listing, 212 of whom had been included in the P. K. Foley

checklist of 1897, and 75 more names not in the Foley list. No authors were included who were living after the year 1930. This is a project which we should heartily support. We have probably three-quarters of the total number of titles which will go into the Bibliography, and intensive effort should be made to acquire as many as possible of the titles which we lack.

To add to our collections of American fiction to 1875 and of the authors not now in our collection of American Literature should be of paramount importance in our plan of buying during the coming year. Under no condition, however, should we neglect the opportunity to complete our collections of newspapers, early imprints, genealogies, and local history. We have such an outstanding position in these four fields that the purchase of the occasional items which are offered for sale should be of primary concern. But the acquisition of titles in the two fields of literature above described, especially considering the comparative low cost of such books, would increase the usefulness of this Library notably.

There have been five deaths in the Society's membership during the past six months. Paul B. Morgan of Worcester, manufacturer and member of the Council, elected in 1926, died November 3, 1952. John B. Stetson, Jr., of Philadelphia, manufacturer and book collector, elected in 1923, died November 15. Herbert E. Bolton of Berkeley, California, professor of history at the University of California and authority on the history of Spanish America, elected in 1913, died January 30, 1953. Andrew Keogh of New Haven, Librarian of Yale University for twenty-two years, elected in 1924, died February 13. Albert B. Wells of Southbridge, for over fifty years connected with the American Optical Company and founder of Sturbridge Village, elected in 1943, died March 10. Obituary notices of these members will appear in the printed *Proceedings* of this meeting.

The Library has acquired many rare books during the past six months. The most desirable item was the only known copy of Peter Folger's *Looking Glass for the Times*, printed in 1725 and the earliest edition of this famous Nantucket poem, this obtained through the aid of our fellow member, Stephen W. Phillips. A highly valued gift was the collection of early children's books, owned and presented by Miss Edith Wetmore of Newport. These and many other gifts and purchases will be described in the Librarian's Report at the annual meeting in October.

Respectfully submitted,

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For the Council

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