

tablished in the newer territories and states, sometimes before there was any substantial body of history to record. In such surroundings, support had to come from the state, if at all. The practice of consistent legislative appropriation for historical societies, first developed in Wisconsin during the second half of the nineteenth century, soon became general throughout the Middle and Far West. As Massachusetts is the prototype of the earlier privately supported historical society, so the State Historical Society of Wisconsin may be considered that of the publicly supported one. Notwithstanding this century-old tradition of legislative support in at least two-thirds of the states, many state historical societies along the Atlantic seaboard still operate entirely upon private funds, as does the California Historical Society in San Francisco. Also, in certain large and prosperous inland cities, like Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis, privately supported historical societies maintain libraries that are of more than local interest.

Since the autumn of 1959, when I began for the Council of Library Resources, Inc., the investigation that led to the publication last year of *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry Into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future*,¹ I have visited such organizations in many parts of the country. They are as varied as they are numerous, ranging from groups without possessions and premises, that simply meet for the reading of papers and the interchange of ideas, to institutions with extraordinary books and manuscripts that are made available to scholars in well organized libraries. No two are exactly alike, or ever will be. There is no common measuring stick by which one can rationally compare them, for their resources in books, manuscripts, funds, and scholarly effort vary according to the age, economic prosperity, and intellectual tradition of the region.

Leaving aside all questions of personal effort and inclination, the field of local history is wider and more varied in New England than farther west, in Virginia than in California, simply because it covers a longer period of settlement; it is more complex in heavily settled than in sparsely settled areas. Thus, the Essex Institute in Salem, although concerned with only a single Massachusetts county, has collections, endowment, and a century-long record of continuous scholarly publication, that considerably surpass those of many state historical societies. But in regions of all ages, the health and prosperity of such organizations has always depended upon a small number of devoted individuals whose efforts have been concentrated upon col-

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lecting, preserving, studying, and publishing the sources for the history of the scene in which they live. In the first half of the nineteenth century, people of this kind, unaided by other than private funds, were responsible for nearly everything that was accomplished in American history. In the last hundred years colleges and universities, public and private libraries, federal and state governments, and historical museums and restorations have entered the field of American history with vastly greater resources. These newer allies have not, however, supplanted the older historical societies. This is largely because the privately supported societies collected broadly and aggressively in an earlier period of little competition; most of them have retained their early acquisitions, and many of them have consistently continued to collect.

For accounts of most of the privately supported state historical societies and a selected group of more local institutions, I refer the reader to my *Independent Historical Societies*. There is an immense number of historical societies throughout the country. Some are extremely valuable; others all but worthless. Of the two thousand listed in the 1961 edition of the American Association for State and Local History's *Directory of Historical Societies and Agencies*, only a little over a third report the ownership of libraries. Many of these "libraries" would prove to be a few shelves of miscellaneous books that might include somebody's set of the Waverley novels. Others contain valuable local imprints that have never reached the catalogs of larger institutions. Only a very small number of privately supported local historical societies have the means to permit the employment of a full-time professional staff. Many local organizations which preserve books and manuscripts from destruction are able to do little to make them available to those who might need them. There are, however, a few dozen societies whose libraries and publications are of paramount importance to the American historian. It is of this small group that I shall attempt to speak in general terms, and to comment upon a few of their significant achievements in recent years.

The chief difference between the privately and publicly supported historical societies is that while both strive to serve the scholar, the latter group also attempts, through museum displays and other devices for popularization, to bring history to a wider audience. In the privately supported societies, where less is attempted in popularization, the library is frequently the paramount objective. Only the New-York Historical Society, the New York State Historical Association,

and the Chicago Historical Society maintain extensive museums that are adequately and professionally staffed. It should be noted that these are the only three private societies in the country with an annual income in excess of \$150,000. When collecting figures for my study in 1959-1960, I found only half a dozen other institutions—Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Connecticut, the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis, and the American Antiquarian Society—with incomes in excess of \$100,000 a year. At the other extreme, thanks to able and devoted people who do not reckon their time at commercial rates, the Georgia Historical Society's accomplishments are amazing on an annual budget of less than \$8,000.

The larger private societies rely heavily upon the income from endowment, much of which they have acquired within the twentieth century, generally from a relatively small number of sizable gifts and bequests. The Massachusetts Historical Society and the American Antiquarian Society still maintain their original concept of a limited semi-honorary membership, without dues. Their members, however, who include not only practicing scholars but interested friends and well-wishers of history, are expected to contribute either work, books and manuscripts, or money, and generally do, in generous fashion. Otherwise membership is generally open to any interested person, although numbers of members do not necessarily bring financial stability. I have the impression that increased membership usually becomes an appreciable monetary asset only in organizations that, like the California Historical Society and the New England Historic Genealogical Society, have minimum annual dues of \$15.00.

With their meager incomes, privately supported societies have generally concentrated and narrowed their fields of interest in the attempt to build upon obvious strengths. In the nineteenth century everything seemed grist for their mills; in the twentieth most of them have become increasingly selective in order to make the best use of their resources. When the late Clarence S. Brigham became librarian of the American Antiquarian Society in 1908, he found a library of about 99,000 volumes containing important collections of early American newspapers and imprints, obtained largely by its founder, Isaiah Thomas, and by Christopher Columbus Baldwin, its librarian from 1832 to 1835. But aside from these valuable early imprints, a great part of the library consisted of miscellaneous books, many of which were in foreign languages or on subjects with no bearing on American history. The building was crowded by equally irrele-

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vant archaeological and ethnological collections, to say nothing of a substantial quota of idle curiosities.

Brigham introduced a rigorous delimitation of fields and had the grandmother of all house cleanings. By concentrating on the collection of every possible early American imprint, and of newspapers, almanacs, genealogy, and American local history, he achieved a collection of national usefulness within a limited field. Today the library contains some 600,000 titles, plus an additional 500,000 manuscripts, maps, broadsides, and prints. The funds at Clarence Brigham's disposal were always infinitesimal in comparison with those available to many other librarians. But by recognizing the importance of certain types of material well in advance of general trends in collecting, by attracting the interest of private collectors who soon became close personal friends and warm supporters of the society, he made what he had go a very long way. Collecting and bibliographical investigation were interwoven in his activities. Thus he not only built in the American Antiquarian Society the largest collection of American newspapers before 1820 in the United States, but also wrote the two volume *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers: 1690-1820*, published by the Society in 1947. Similarly his definitive *Paul Revere's Engravings* that appeared in 1954 was based upon decades of collecting Revere's work for the Society.

Lyman H. Butterfield began an address before the 1960 annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists with a pertinent observation:

The two-legged pack rat has been a common species in Boston and its neighborhood since the seventeenth century. Thanks to his activity the archival and manuscript resources concentrated in the Boston area, if we extend it slightly north to include Salem and slightly west to include Worcester, are so rich and diverse as to be *almost* beyond the dreams of avarice. Not quite, of course, because Boston institutions and the super-pack rats who direct them are still eager to add to their resources of this kind, and constantly do.²

Clarence S. Brigham was definitely of this breed. His successor, Clifford K. Shipton, justly wrote of him:

Considering how much he achieved with the funds available to him, Clarence Brigham was certainly the greatest collector in his generation. His genius in selecting fields which were to become popular for collectors was amazing. No historian himself, he recognized

fields of potential source material before most of the professionals, and was the first to collect them. I have often seen him in a state of exasperation at a visiting professor who had to have his nose rubbed in a kind of source material which he was determined to ignore because his predecessors had not used it. Certainly no librarian in Brig's generation was a better and more willing guide and counselor to anyone engaged in research.³

The New-York Historical Society, which today has a library of half a million books, 18,000 broadsides, 3,000 manuscript and printed maps, 1,200 atlases, 35,000 prints, 150,000 photographs, and 750,000 manuscripts, originally defined its fields as ". . . the natural, civil, literary, and ecclesiastical history of the United States in general and of this State in particular."⁴ In 1804, when Lewis and Clark had not yet crossed the continent and when libraries and learned institutions were few in number even in the most settled parts of the country, this was a reasonable aspiration. Although the passage of time constantly reduced the practicability of this original purpose, the collections continued to be assembled on so broad a basis that it was not always clear whether the society's objective was state or national history. In 1956, on the recommendations of Lawrence C. Wroth, the Society adopted a more restricted acquisition policy based on the view that it was fundamentally a state historical society located in New York, but that its strong collections of various special fields of United States history other than New York would be recognized by continuing acquisitions in those fields, within certain limits. Similarly the Massachusetts Historical Society has recently undertaken a drastic weeding of its printed holdings in order to concentrate on materials printed in Massachusetts through 1825, early items relating to Massachusetts printed elsewhere, and the important basic materials on Massachusetts and New England history after 1825.

While no privately supported historical society can today buy widely and competitively in the open market against all comers, some of them still make frequent major additions to their holdings. Stephen T. Riley, who is the present director of the Massachusetts Historical Society, another super-pack rat, increases his manuscript collection as dramatically and as economically as Clarence S. Brigham did the early American imprints and newspapers of the American Antiquarian Society. Having inherited a great collection, begun in Washington's presidency, Stephen Riley constantly adds papers of equal quality. In the spring of 1956, to have received simultaneous gifts of the papers

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of Paul Revere and of four generations of the Adams family is evidence of the continuing vitality of his collecting. In similar fashion the important manuscript collection of the Virginia Historical Society has twice in recent years been enriched by major additions of Lee papers, for John M. Jennings has a magnetic attraction for manuscripts that resembles Stephen Riley's.

The Massachusetts Historical Society occupies a building constructed for it in 1899. The New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Chicago societies similarly have buildings designed for them in the present century. Adapted houses or historic buildings, with additions, accommodate the Maine, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Columbia (District of Columbia), South Carolina, and California societies, the Filson Club in Louisville, and the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland. The Cincinnati Historical Society (formerly the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio), after lodging with the University of Cincinnati Library for some decades, is about to move to a new wing of the Cincinnati Art Museum. Most of these societies are chronically crowded and driven to improvisation. Only the Virginia Historical Society, which in 1959, with the aid of the Old Dominion Foundation and local friends, added a library wing to Battle Abbey in Richmond, has thoroughly convenient quarters with ample elbow room and the enchanting vision of vacant shelves in its stacks.

As a rule, help is scarce. Few of these libraries would claim that they have all their possessions under satisfactory control by orthodox library methods, but as they are generally staffed by people, however few in number, who have a keen interest in the history of their region, they are usually able to be extremely helpful to the scholar who knows what he wants. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the New Jersey Historical Society have published useful guides to their manuscript collections. Until time can be found for the preparation of similar guides to other libraries, the National Historical Publications Commission's, *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* is the principal key to the holdings of privately supported historical societies. Some reporting has been done to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, but far more awaits the acquisition of additional hands.

In addition to maintaining their libraries, many of the older privately supported historical societies have published great numbers of the documents in their possession and studies of the history of their

regions. In the nineteenth century, publication generally took the form of volumes appearing at irregular intervals. The Massachusetts Historical Society has printed seventy-four volumes of its *Proceedings* from 1791 to 1962, seventy-nine volumes of *Collections*, as well as close to a hundred titles outside these numbered series. The pattern of *Proceedings* and *Collections* was generally followed in the nineteenth century, but since 1877 when the Historical Society of Pennsylvania inaugurated *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* the alternative, or the supplement, of a quarterly has been widely emulated. The Virginia Historical Society began the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* in 1893. At the turn of the century the South Carolina Historical Society began publishing a quarterly, and in 1906 the Maryland Historical Society established the *Maryland Historical Magazine*. From the decade of 1910-1920 date the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* and the *New-York Historical Society Quarterly*; from the 1920's the *New York History* of the New York State Historical Association and the *California Historical Society Quarterly*; and from 1946 *Delaware History*.

In an effort to make rare sources more easily available to scholars, the Massachusetts Historical Society issued two series of Photostat Americana. In the first of these, edited by Worthington C. Ford in the decade immediately following World War I, were 261 titles of carefully chosen imprints, ranging from the discovery of America to the close of the Revolution, reproduced for eleven subscribing libraries. The second series of 169 numbers brought the total of titles reproduced to 430. Between 1915 and 1933 the Society similarly reproduced, in somewhat larger quantities, five colonial newspapers, *The Georgia Gazette*, 1763-73, *The Domestic Intelligence*, 1679-80, *The Boston News-Letter*, 1704-76, *The New-England Courant*, 1721-26, and, in collaboration with the Virginia Historical Society, *The Virginia Gazette*, 1736-80. In addition, photostats were produced of George Washington's Ledger A, from the original in the Library of Congress, of the records of the West Parish of Barnstable, Massachusetts, of Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi* with annotations by Christopher Columbus, and, in collaboration with the Rhode Island Historical Society, of the letters and papers of Roger Williams, 1629-82.

With the coming of World War II large-scale photostatic undertakings became impossible; by the end of the war it was clear that microphotography offered a more economical and manageable solution for the dissemination of historical sources. Thus the Historical

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Society of Pennsylvania has prepared and offered for sale some 130 reels of microfilm of eighteenth century Pennsylvania newspapers as well as the *New-York Journal*, 1766-76. The most comprehensive contribution of this nature by a privately supported historical society is the American Antiquarian Society's *Early American Imprints, 1639-1800*, edited by Clifford K. Shipton, which is a microprint edition of every extant book, pamphlet, and broadside printed in what is now the United States from 1639 to the end of the year 1800. Keyed to Charles Evans's *American Bibliography*, it not only reprints in full the texts of more than 30,000 titles, but includes all of Dr. Shipton's very substantial revisions of Charles Evans's pioneering effort. The work, which is sponsored by the Committee on Documentary Reproduction of the American Historical Association, is published by the American Antiquarian Society by the Readex Microprint process, which offered an edition savings superior to any of the other micro-reproduction processes. Its cards are issued in boxes of a size and shape to facilitate shelving like books. The subscription price of \$8,000 begins to seem reasonable when one remembers that *Early American Imprints* furnishes usable reproductions of works seldom if ever to be readily found in the book trade, at a cost of scarcely more than twenty-five cents each.

The Massachusetts Historical Society has recently used microfilm as the means of disseminating two of its major manuscript collections. The papers of President John Adams, his son President John Quincy Adams, his grandson Charles Francis Adams, together with those of their wives and children, were deposited in the Society in 1905, and in 1956, on the termination of a family trust, made an outright gift. The Society reproduced these on 608 reels of 35 mm film, offering sets of positive film for sale at an advance subscription price of \$3,000. Forty-five sets (including those required for copyright purposes) were produced. The \$120,000 from subscriptions made the project self-liquidating so far as materials and photographic expenses were concerned; it did not, however, reimburse the Society for the considerable amount of time spent by its staff in arranging the papers for filming. On completion of the project, the subscription price was raised to \$4,500 per set. The papers of General Henry Knox (1750-1806), deposited in the Massachusetts Historical Society by the New England Historic Genealogical Society, have similarly been micro-filmed in fifty-five reels. These are offered for sale, with an index volume, at \$375 a set.

In 1954, while the microfilming of the Adams papers was still in its early stages, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press offered to print and publish, at its expense, a selective edition of some one hundred volumes of the Adams papers, provided the Society would undertake the editing. Such a task would have been beyond the normal current resources of the Society, but through the interest of Roy E. Larsen, who was both president of Time, Inc., and chairman of the visiting committee of the Harvard University Press, a solution was found. Time, Inc., agreed to give \$250,000 to the Massachusetts Historical Society, payable over a ten-year period, in return for the advance serialization rights for *Life* magazine of the Adams volumes that were to be published by the Belknap Press. The Society was thus able to persuade Dr. Lyman H. Butterfield to join its staff as editor in chief of the Adams papers. The six volumes that have appeared under his editorship have been received with national acclaim. Seven others are in press at the moment of writing, but as the project will extend many years beyond the expiration of the initial Time, Inc., grant, permanent financing of the editorial work is now being sought with the aid of the National Historical Publications Commission. An evidence of the wide interest in the undertaking is the agreement by Atheneum Publishers, to reprint in high-grade paperbacks, after the passage of a set time, all the volumes of the Adams papers published by the Belknap Press.

Another major editorial project in which a privately supported historical society actively participates is *The Papers of James Madison*, jointly sponsored by the University of Chicago and the University of Virginia, of which three volumes have thus far appeared. Coeditor of the Madison papers is William M. E. Rachal, editor of the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, who carries out his part of the Madison enterprise in the library of the Virginia Historical Society.

On another floor of the Virginia Historical Society, William J. Barrow maintains the laboratory, supported by a grant from the Council on Library Resources, Inc., in which he investigates, for the benefit of librarians and readers everywhere, the durability of book papers and bindings. With an array of ovens, iceboxes, and ingenious machines, he simulates in a few hours conditions that normally would require decades or centuries of use, proposes cures, tests his hypotheses, and then makes his findings widely available. Thus a society founded for the preservation of the local past has a share in projects

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that are of universal future significance for the preservation of general knowledge.

In a recent report of the American Antiquarian Society, Clifford K. Shipton tells how

. . . a member of the Supreme Court of Tasmania walked in to ask me to explain a rumor heard on the other side of the world to the effect that in the eastern part of the United States, librarians "like little birds in their nests agree" instead of crouching, vulture-like, waiting for the death of prospective donors, to drop on their collections and rend them with bloody talons into unrecognizable fragments, to be carried back to their own particular nests. I told the Judge that, if only to avoid indigestion, we librarians had formed the habit of cooperating, in order to centralize research collections in the institutions where they would be most useful.⁵

An outstanding example of such cooperation is the statesmanlike and imaginative manner in which the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the Library Company of Philadelphia are at this moment moving forward with plans that will advance historical scholarship.

The library, which is the pre-eminent function of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, contains something over half a million books, pamphlets, newspapers, and broadsides, as well as a great manuscript collection. When the second edition of the *Guide to the Manuscript Collections of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania* appeared in 1949, it stated that ". . . some 4,000,000 items are to be found in 1,609 collections . . ." and that ". . . whereas in 1940 only 30% of the manuscripts were arranged for ready use by students, . . ." in 1949, 98 per cent were in that order.⁶ While the collection deals primarily with Philadelphia and with Pennsylvania, nevertheless, because of Pennsylvania's importance to the United States, there is much that is of national interest. The library is adequately housed in a fireproof building at 1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia, which was completed in 1910.

The Library Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1731 by a group of merchants, tradesmen, and artisans that included Benjamin Franklin, soon became a significant part of the city's intellectual resources. As Edwin Wolf, 2nd, its present librarian, has observed:

The collection of the Library Company reflects a unique picture of American life. Franklin's first electrical experiments, which were performed in its rooms, are recalled in its rich collection of scientific

books. Its fascinating old works on natural history came over from England in the same boxes with seeds for James Logan and John Bartram. Logan's brother and two of his grandchildren, and Benjamin Rush and his son James were physicians. Their interests remain on our shelves in a remarkable group of medical books. The Company's members were active in politics and its rooms on the second-floor of Carpenters' Hall were open to the members of the Continental Congress which had met downstairs. Impressive rows of political pamphlets and broadsides issued from the time of the Stamp Act to the establishment of the Constitution survive from those days. . . . Here then are the records, the raw material of history.⁷

In 1851 when Charles Coffin Jewett published the first survey of American libraries, the Library Company of Philadelphia ranked with Harvard, Yale, the Boston Athenaeum, and the Library of Congress, as the only five in the United States containing more than fifty thousand volumes. Although its usefulness to the city continued undiminished for several decades thereafter, the Library Company took an unfortunate step in the late seventies. It abandoned its building on 5th Street near Independence Hall and accepted instead a great new neoclassical structure at Broad and Christian streets, provided under the will of Dr. James Rush, and named the Ridgway Building in grateful acknowledgment that Dr. Rush's fortune had come from his father-in-law, Jacob Ridgway. At the time this seemed an admirable move, but it proved to be exactly the opposite. The new location was always remote, so remote in fact that it became necessary to build a supplementary library for current reading at Locust and Juniper streets. With the establishment of the Free Library in 1894, the unique usefulness of the Library Company to citizens of Philadelphia was diminished. The neighborhood of the Ridgway Building deteriorated. Its approaches and surroundings became grubbier by the year; its rich treasures were gradually forgotten by all but a handful of scholars. The depression of the early 1930's diminished the Library Company's income to a point that in 1940 required the abandonment and demolition of the Locust Street library and the consolidation of all the books in the Ridgway Building. The site of the Locust Street library became a parking lot. From 1943 to 1955 the Free Library of Philadelphia served as the corporate librarian of the Company, responsible for the administration of the library in return for a fee.

This interim time-marking counsel of desperation, which amounted to making the Ridgway Building a branch public library in a par-

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ticularly sordid slum, was hardly the ideal means of caring for the great scholarly resources of the Library Company. It ended after a surprising and wholly delightful improvement in the Library Company's fortunes from a most unlikely source. In 1952, by building a four-story parking garage on the site of the former Locust Street branch, the income of the Library Company improved to a state where its directors were once more able to make their own plans for the future, with an assurance of being able to carry them out. Edwin Wolf, 2nd, formerly with the rare-book firm of Rosenbach, was engaged as librarian, with the mission of retrieving the early treasures of the library from the Augean stable that the Ridgway stacks had become. By 1959 when Mr. Wolf had discovered, recataloged, reshelved, and rehabilitated some 50,000 rare books and pamphlets, it became clear that the Ridgway Building was a totally unsuitable home for the revived research institution that he was creating out of the shambles. While this work of revivification had no official connection with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, it should be noted that Nicholas B. Wainwright, head of the research department at the Society, was also president of the Library Company of Philadelphia, and that he and Mr. Wolf were like-minded and energetic scholars who instinctively moved in step. So it came about that, with the hearty concurrence of a group of non-Philadelphian librarians and scholars, the Library Company in 1960 determined to abandon the Ridgway Building and construct a new library on Locust Street, adjoining the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The immensely complicated legal and organizational aspects of this move have now been cleared away, and final plans for the building are in process of completion. By this juxtaposition the great imprints of the Library Company and the great manuscripts of the Historical Society will become increasingly useful to scholars, and both institutions will be making better use of their resources. This is a remarkable example of the imagination that old privately supported societies can, on occasion, bring to the solution of their problems.

As such institutions are never likely to have their financial resources multiply at the rate of those of schools and other public institutions, indefinite expansion on all fronts is out of the question. But by thoughtful consideration of their greatest strengths, in relation to the good of learning, they can, and often do, achieve a specialization within manageable limits that brings high returns on each dollar expended. Thus American historians continue to find the libraries of

privately supported historical societies fruitful hunting grounds as well as pleasant places to work.

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