Fall Meeting

OUR FALL MEETING, October 28, at 8:00, promises to be one of the best ever. It would be a little undignified to call it a “three ring circus,” but we have scheduled three major attractions.

Dr. Howard H. Peckham, director of the library from 1953 to 1977, will return to deliver the Randolph G. Adams Lecture, evaluating the legacy of the American Revolution Bicentennial to serious historical scholarship. The celebration of our nation’s two-hundredth birthday superficially looked like a “side-show,” but behind the fireworks and parades, lasting contributions were made to our understanding of the revolution by historians, preservationists, libraries and museums.

In conjunction with the Clements Library’s recent publication, The Revolution Remembered, we commissioned artist Andrew Nathaniel Wyeth to do a series of eight pen and ink drawings of wartime incidents captured in the pensioners’ memoirs. The original drawings will be on display, and a handsome portfolio, limited to 1000 copies, signed by the artist, is being prepared as a gift to Associate members.

Mr. Wyeth, who resides in Lebanon, Connecticut, comes by his artistic interest and talent naturally, being a grandson of N. C. Wyeth, and grand nephew of Howard Pyle, who created some of the finest examples of American historical illustration. Some of Mr. Wyeth’s other work will also be on display. The artist will be in attendance.

The evening will also be the official opening of an exhibit marking the 200th anniversary of the Benedict Arnold-John André affair. The library’s Manuscript Division contains most of the original documents on this exciting chapter in the Revolution, including Arnold’s famous letter, in code, offering West Point to the British.

The evening’s program promises to be a “sell-out,” so make your reservations early.

Gift

THE LIBRARY HAS recently been the grateful recipient of one hundred and one pamphlets and books, two photographs, and four manuscript letters from Associate Mrs. Albert C. Jacobs of Ann Arbor. Mrs. Jacobs is the daughter of Junius E. Beal, Ann Arbor publisher, University regent, and book collector. Mr. Beal’s knowledgeable appreciation of fellow regent William L. Clements’ collection enabled him to play a primary role in the establishment of the library.

The pamphlets and books are a delightful cross-section of 19th-century Americana, including historical novels, almanacs, and promotional literature. The two large photographs, dating from the 1890’s, show the old Dental College-Engineering Building which was the original structure on the library’s present site. Manuscripts include a rare document of 1789 signed by and docketed with four lines in the Mohawk language by the famous Indian chief Joseph Brant; a 1793 letter by the great American printer Isaiah Thomas, described elsewhere in this issue; a two-page letter of Edward Everett to Henry Dearborn, Dec. 22, 1827, about politics; and a fine letter of Henry Schoolcraft to New York antiquarian Dr. John W. Francis, Dec. 27, 1854.

Chapbook

PENNIES HAWKING every conceivable commodity have always been part of British street life. Penny pamphlets, handbills, and broadside posters hold a particular fascination for bibliographers and booksellers for a number of reasons: they are often charming yet crude in appearance, coarse in language, and scarce. Easily and often anonymously printed and quickly sold, these were natural vehicles for avoiding the sheriff, the censor, and the Stationer. This was truly a literature of the masses, often ungrammatical, bawdy,
radical. Even the moralistic pieces tend to be sensational, closely akin to the magazines offered at supermarket checkout lines today.

The chapbooks sold by these street vendors (often known as chapmen) are rarely prized for their factual content, and there are very few such products of the European press which have any American interest. Indians transported in all their savage splendor to Europe, such as the famous “Four Indian Kings” brought by Colonel Schuyler to the court of Queen Anne in 1710, inspired a certain amount of this literature, presumably the result of public curiosity. One other area of American colonial history which touched lower class life in Britain sufficiently to produce a popular literature was the voyage to the New World. The British Museum and the Bodleian Library have several broadside verses of the 17th and early 18th centuries with such charming titles as The Maydens of Londons brave adventures, or, A Boon Voyage intended for the Sea, The Woman Outwitted: or, the Weaver’s Wife cunningly catch’d in a Trap, by her Husband, who sold her for ten Pounds, and sent her to Virginny, and A Voyage to Virginia: or, The Valiant Soullier’s Farwel to his Love. Such verses were obscurely printed and reprinted, sometimes more than a century after they were first composed.

We have had the good fortune to pick up one of these, printed in Sheffield, England, at the end of the 18th century but unquestionably written decades before. The title is self-explanatory, being only slightly shorter than the text!

The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon: Being a Sorrowful Account of the Fourteen Years Transportation of James Reve, The Unhappy sufferer, at Virginia in America, who was put apprentice by his father to a tinman, near Moorfields where he got into bad company, and before long ran away, and went robbing with a gang of thieves—but his master soon got him back again. Yet he would not be kept from his old companions, but went thieving with them again; for which he was transported fourteen years. With an Account of the way the Transports work, and the punishment they receive for committing any fault. Concluding with a Word of Advice to All Young Men.

Two copies of a London edition of the verse are located in American libraries, but the Sheffield edition appears neither in Sabin or Mansell.

Collecting Americana

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS, as part of its new Michigan Faculty Series, has just issued a title many of our Associates will want to acquire. In Historical Americana: Books from Which Our Early History Is Written, Howard H. Peckham, former director of the library, provides a description of how the “facts” of our history became a part of our common knowledge.

Through ten illustrated, topical chapters, Mr. Peckham delves into the fascinating world of the primary sources, the first-hand narratives, the highly-prized, seminal books, which provide the factual foundation of our knowledge of America.
can discovery, settlement, religious and literary development, science, music, the Revolution and westward movement, sport, and architecture. A final chapter provides a few hints to the aspiring collector. In keeping with the rest of the series, Historical Americana is aimed at the educated public, not simply the specialist. It does not overpower the reader with minutiae and retains the light, witty, and highly readable style characteristic of all the author's distinguished publications.

The paperback book, which retails for $5.95, is available by mail from the University of Michigan Press, Box 1104, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, or can be ordered through bookstores. As an added attraction, it will be available to Associates at the fall meeting at a substantial discount.

Unknown to Claiborne and Beard

Weary Travellers to Cincinnati late in 1847 could have been rested and refreshed at “the largest and most splendid establishment in the Western Country,” according to an interesting pamphlet recently received. The item is titled Bill of Fare and Regulations of the Great Western Dining Rooms and Restaurant [sic], which was established and operated by Shires & Evans. It is in fact a menu; twenty-four pages describing the finest western cuisine of the day.

If the country was still a bit rough then, and not up to eastern standards, still the restaurant’s menu could not be faulted for variety and quantity. Under the heading of roasts, for example, are listed all the items which could be obtained in that form. The hungry diner could choose from forty possibilities: anything from beef, veal, and pork roasts, to opposition, woodcock, and plover, to shad, pickerel, and catfish. If roasts did not appeal, one might select baked clam pie, mutton, or Indian cakes; boiled pig’s feet, Irish potatoes, or green corn; broiled mackerel, rabbit, or buffalo; fried eels, sausages, egg plant, or mush. Thirty-two stewed dishes were offered, not to mention eighteen kinds of soups and twenty kinds of bread. And at the last, to finally sate one’s appetite, one could choose one (or more?) of the sixty-six desserts on the menu.

Of course, what may set present-day diners wishing for a time-machine are the prices. In the public ordinary, or dining room, breakfast could be had for 15 cents, dinner for 20 cents, and supper for 15 cents. Meals in the private ordinary were 20 cents for breakfast or supper, and 30 cents for the big noon meal. If the diner wanted a lighter and less expensive repast, the proprietors would serve meat-and-vegetable plates for a dime, and soup at all hours for a nickel a bowl.

The pamphlet describing the establishment of Shires & Evans was a gift to the library from Mrs. Dwight Dumond, and bears on its cover the name “Jas G. Birney / Saginaw / Michigan.” Whether or not Mr. Birney ever enjoyed the meals of Shires & Evans, we do not know, although we know from a letter in our collections that his son was in Cincinnati in December 1847, and wrote to his father in Saginaw. And we also know that someone in the noted anti-slavery family was impressed enough to follow the instruction which the proprietors placed on the cover of their menu-ad: “Please not to destroy this Pamphlet; it will be found invaluable to families and others, as a reference, and serve to show to strangers abroad the abundance and variety of our Markets.”

Political Handbook

Edward Chamberlayne, an English scholar writing in the last decades of the seventeenth century, began a useful tradition. In 1669 he published Angliae Notitiae, or the Present State of England, the first political handbook. Our generation, wearied by electronic political reporting and instant polls can only marvel at Chamberlayne’s confidence. He set out to “inform the World of the Present State of this Kingdom; divers reflections are made upon the Past State, so by computing that with the Present, some worthy persons may thereby, not only be moved to endeavour the Restoration of what was heretofore better, and the abolition of what is now worse, but also in some measure may foresee without consulting Astrologers, and Apocalyptic Men, what will be the Future State of this Nation.”

From the beginning Angliae Notitiae was a remarkable success. From its inception to 1755 a total of 36 editions was published. The series provides an invaluable source of information for anyone studying English history. It is far more than a list of officeholders but rather attempts to collect information on a wide range of topics—economics, demography, linguistics, law, topography, among others.

We are indebted to Professor Jacob M. Price for a fine 1682 edition of Angliae Notitiae, which greatly strengthens our Chamberlayne collection.
Rumford's Ideal House

Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford (1753–1814), was best known as the "master of fire and fuel," a philanthropist-scientist whose investigations of heat rivaled Benjamin Franklin's work on electricity. Rumford's interests ranged from designs for chimneys and carriage wheels to cooking pots and soup kitchens. In 1812, at the age of sixty, he heard from Thomas Butler, of Philadelphia, who sought Rumford's ideas on building a house. In a letter now at the library, Rumford replied:

"Were I to build a house for myself I know that I should pay particular attention to many circumstances little attended to by architects... It would be easy to state in general terms that my house would be only one story high, that it would front full to the south, that there would be only one very large window in each room, which should be double in winter, that a piazza or open Gallery, roofed, should give shade to my windows in summer when the Sun is high. The communication between the apartments should be established by means of a corridor about 6 or 7 feet wide, running from one end of the building to the other, on the north side, which would tend much to make the house warm in winter and cool in summer."

Thermodynamics figured in all aspects of Rumford's construction: "I would make all the walls of the house very thin, but double, leaving about 18 inches of confined air between the two walls, which, to make them strong, might be connected here and there by small arches which would serve as braces. The free space included between the two walls might be employed as cupboards or closets, which might easily be concealed in fitting up the inside of the rooms, by forming the wainscot into panels.

"I would support the front part of the roof of my open Gallery with a row of very slender columns, placed at considerable distances from each other and on these columns I would establish a broad entablature, to hide the roof, leaving room at the bottom of it for the passage of the rain and snow. This arrangement would defend the walls of the rooms from the rain, which would tend greatly to preserve the building and render the apartments dry and wholesome... These are but rough hints."

Rumford died two years after expressing these interesting views, never having built a house of his own. This excellent letter was purchased from the Diedrich fund.

Summer Fun

The 19th Century was a razzle-dazzle heyday of mechanical wonder and Yankee knowhow. Alongside hero-inventors like Howe, Edison, Morse, Colt, McCormick and Goodyear, were thousands of anonymous tinkerers who patented everything from apple corers to bath tubs to steam engines. International fairs exhibited the new marvels and advertisements extolled improved, prize-winning, never-fail products.

Drawing on illustrated articles from Scientific American and ads from broadsides and city directories, the Clements Library presented a popular August/September exhibit entitled "Gadgets, Gizmos, Gewgaws: 19th-century American Ingenuity." The show emphasized humorous and bizarre inventions such as Brown's Patent Baby Tender, Prof. Chase's respiration cabinet and House's Patent Alarm Bed, and included waterproof clothing, mechanical limbs, washing machines, collapsible furniture, shower-baths, bicycles, office machines, stoves, and kitchen gadgets of all kinds and descriptions.

The exhibit, prepared by Assistant Manuscript Curator Barbara Mitchell, was enhanced by the gracious loan of numerous colorful trade cards and gadgets from the collections of the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn.

Virtue of Procrastination

Isaiah Thomas (1749–1831) was the greatest of our early American printers, not only because of the quality of his work, but his innovative publishing practices and his consuming interest in the history of his craft in America. The American Antiquarian Society, which he founded in 1812, continues to flourish today in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Mrs. Loretta Beal Jacobs of Ann Arbor has given us a letter of Thomas to Dr. John Lathrop, dated March 6, 1793, which provides an interesting footnote on bookbinding practices in the eighteenth century. He notes that "Your sermons have been out of the press about a fortnight, and are now in the hands of the binder. I regret the necessity of binding them so speedily from the press, as when the printing is fresh, the binder's hammer blurs the printing. ... No books should be bound until 6 or 8 months after printing—this is the reason that in England, new books are published in boards."