Late Spring Meeting

The Extremes of the current winter makes one wonder if spring will ever arrive in 1982. To be on the safe side, we have pushed the Associates meeting back a little. Make a note on your calendar for the evening of May 11 at 8 P.M.

Professor Kenneth Lockridge of the University's history department delivered the Goodman Lectures at the University of Western Ontario in 1980, published this year by Cambridge University Press as Settlement and Unsettlement in Early America. Synthesizing recent scholarship and drawing upon his own extensive research, he presents a fascinating hypothesis describing a certain inherent, anti-authoritarian tendency built into the American character long before the Revolution.

The book is drawing real interest among colonial historians, and Professor Lockridge has generously consented to speak to us in May. We will promise our usual fine refreshments afterwards and will make every effort to secure early May weather at its best!

Fire!

In mid-December of last year the library planned an exhibit to open early the following month, “Firefighting in Early America.” We had no idea how ominously timely it was. On Christmas eve, the 125-year-old Economics Building went up in flames on the central campus.

The exhibit traced the ways in which Americans tried to prevent and then to fight fires which devastated their cities from colonial times until 1900. On display were sermons exhorting citizens to forestall God’s fiery wrath by sinning no more, as well as prints and letters illustrating many terrible conflagrations which did occur.

One of these, a horrendous fire in San Francisco on May 3, 1851 (the worst, in fact, before the fire caused by the 1906 earthquake), was described by A. Parker Crittenden in a letter to his wife a week later. Crittenden, along with a few others, tried to save the building in which he was then working. They doused blankets with water and hung them at the windows. “We were enveloped in flame,” he wrote. “It was a perfect sea of fire roaring and rushing around us with a sound louder than the breaking of the waves on the shore. . . .

“The window sash then took fire—the glass cracked and fell out—the hot scorching air and dense smoke poured in, bringing with it clouds of cinders and blazing coals. For a time it was a desperate struggle. But by the careful use of the little water we had, by dipping cloths into that which had run down on the floor and using them to smother the flames wherever they broke out, we still resisted with success. The burning coals which were rolling and drifting about the rooms we trod out with our boots. The want of air was our great difficulty—and the heat was intolerable. . . .

“At the most critical time the steps leading from the first to the second story began to smoke and then to blaze. We had not a quart of water. If we could not stop the fire here the house was gone and the last expedient must be tried. For 20 minutes it seemed hopeless. We had no water to drink—were completely exhausted and ready to faint. We made preparation for the worst—cut up blankets and tied them together so as to be able to start from any window at which the heat was least. But we were determined to come out triumphant. We found a bottle or two of brandy and several boxes of claret. Imagine how grateful a relief. It gave us new strength. We saved the stairway. The heat gradually abated. Danger was at an end.”

The Crittenden letter was loaned to the library by Associates’ Board member Dr. Thomas Kingsley. The writer survived the fire, only to be gunned down by a beautiful, jealous mistress some years later. But we will have much more on the Crittendens in the June Quarto!
Fire Again!

On December 9, 1747, the court house in Boston burned to the ground for the second time in the century. Such “remarkable Judgements of GOD upon the Land” were not permitted to pass unnoticed by our New England forebears, and a day was set apart on January 28, 1747, for fasting and prayer.

Nathanael Appleton, pastor of the first church in Cambridge, undertook the usual piously critical look at Massachusetts to figure out why God should be punishing, or at least warning, his countrymen. In his fast sermons, recently picked up by the library, he selected monetary inflation as the crying oppression of the moment.

“As there not the Cry of Colleges, and Schools, and other Societies, that depend upon the Incomes of public Monies for their Support, that the Funds laid by their pious and generous Benefactors are sunk after such a Manner, that they are not able to support their Officers, nor defray their necessary Charges?”

Appleton gave a specific example of a widow whose husband died at the beginning of the century “who had Three Pounds a year settled upon her, instead of her Dowry.” At the time, this would buy two cords of wood, four bushels of Indian corn, one bushel each of rye and malt, fifty pounds of pork and sixty pounds of beef. By 1748 her investment had lost 75% of its purchasing power.

Inflation, a prevailing problem of our era, was equally worrisome in the eighteenth century. But our attitudes about it have clearly changed. In Pastor Appleton’s eyes, the poor widow had literally been robbed of her inheritance by an irresponsible government which had issued too much insufficiently-backed paper currency.

A modern critic would, most likely, point the finger of blame at the widow herself or her advisors for not adapting investments to an inflationary environment. We certainly do not attribute our natural or human disasters to the monetary judgments of our elected officials. Presumably, our attitude does represent progress, but one wonders today if there isn’t still a moral element involved in inflation, particularly when it concerns persons of limited, fixed incomes.

The recent Christmas Eve burning of the Economics Building at the university would not have gone unnoticed in the New England pulpits of 1748. One wonders what the fast day sermon message would have been.
Winter Bequest

The Clements Library received one of the most timely, and completely unexpected gifts in its history in 1976, in the form of a $50,000 bequest from Mrs. John Garrett Winter of Ann Arbor.

At the time, the library was negotiating for the purchase of the papers of Charles Townshend (1725–1767), whose name is primarily associated with the “Townshend Acts,” which irritated the colonists, and whose papers are exceptionally important in understanding this difficult period of Anglo-American politics. It was probably the most important manuscript acquisition in several decades, and it was made possible only by the Winter bequest.

The library’s Committee of Management placed the remaining funds in an expendable trust account, which would draw interest, but which also could be drawn upon when significant purchasing opportunities arose. The fund has been used in this manner, and now, eight years later has been exhausted.

In retrospect, what did we get for our money, and in what ways has the collection been enriched as a result of a $50,000 gift? In addition to the Townshend Papers, the Winter Fund allowed us to acquire three sizable manuscript collections: the Reuben Tower Family Papers, an extensive early nineteenth-century New York State collection rich in business and educational history; the papers of Gideon Lee, Jacksonian era mayor of New York City; the papers of Nathaniel Stacy, a pioneering missionary of the Universalist denomination in western New York and Michigan.

We acquired an exciting manuscript diary of a Mexican War soldier describing the march of American troops from Vera Cruz to Mexico City and a manuscript colonial tune book with “fraktur” style penmanship.

The bequest provided the opportunity for some remarkable map acquisitions: two beautifully drawn maps of a town and fort on the Southern Indian frontier dated 1792; what is probably the only contemporary manuscript map of a small War of 1812 military engagement at St. Regis on the St. Lawrence; a fine manuscript map of Mackinack Island, ca. 1820’s, showing ground cover, property lines, and the outline of every structure and fortification. $3,000 from the Winter Fund was applied toward, and instrumental in enabling us to bid on the Hack Atlas. In the area of printed maps, we secured a previously unknown 1794 coastal atlas by Laurie & Whittle; Amos Doolittle’s intriguing and scarce map of New Haven; a large promotional map of Prairie de Chien (1887).

One great prize brought to us by the Winter Fund was bought without our comprehending its unique importance. In the late 1760’s, two separately-published sheets, containing strip maps of the Mason & Dixon Line, were published in Philadelphia. They are among the scarcest American colonial maps. We lacked both parts, and were delighted to acquire what we thought was the Pennsylvania/Maryland portion in an uncut sheet. Two years after we owned it and cataloged it, close examination shows it to be not printed, but beautifully executed pen and ink—most certainly the original used by the engraver to etch the copper plate!

Among several dozen printed titles secured with the Winter Fund were seventeenth-century and Benjamin Franklin imprints, the complete file of a scarce deistical periodical containing America’s first science fiction novel, a bound volume containing unique booksellers’ catalogs, and several important pamphlets on the Great Awakening and the terrible yellow fever epidemics of the 1790’s. The Vain Prodigal Life (1680), incidentally the first separate pamphlet to describe an American murder, is a highly important statement concerning the obscure topic of indentured servitude in seventeenth-century Virginia.

If we were to assemble a thoroughly detached panel of rare book and manuscript dealers, they most likely would turn green with envy and estimate that we had enriched the library’s collections by three or four times the amount of the original bequest. Every item is rare, the majority of them unique, and they have and will continue to draw scholars to the library from around the country and enhance the opportunities for historical study at the University.

The great benefit of an unrestricted gift or bequest for acquisitions is that it gives the library the priceless opportunity to not merely wait for, but search for great opportunities, to jump immediately when they present themselves, and to drive the best bargain, cash in hand. The library will forever be a considerably greater place, thanks to be thoughtfulness and generosity of Mrs. Winter.
A Civil War Prize

"It was my great good fortune to succeed to the command of the Grand Army that was grouped about Chattanooga, in the Spring of 1864, when all its members had become moulded into good and veteran soldiers... How well I remember that beautiful morning in May, when over the wires came the order to move, and the columns poured out by every road and pathway, all pointing straight at an enemy entrenched at Dalton."

General William Tecumseh Sherman had a rapt audience as he began his talk to Union veterans on the evening of November 25, 1870, in Cleveland. "From Chattanooga to Atlanta, One Hundred Days under Fire," Sherman's title for his stirring speech, is now in the Clements Library—an extraordinary twelve-page draft in Sherman's hand. James S. Schoff bought the manuscript at auction in New York late last year and presented it for inclusion in the Schoff Civil War Collection at the Clements.

It took Sherman over two months to reach Atlanta, nipping at the heels of General Joe Johnston's rebel army every inch along the way. "While you of the Army of the Cumberland were clambering the precipices of Rocky Face and acting as though we intended to force a passage through the Buzzard Roost gap, I knew what you did not, that another Brave and well appointed army under McPherson was breaking its way through Snake Creek gap leading to Resaca... I thought that Joe Johnston was our victim then, but he was too smart. He saw his danger and without hesitation let go the works he had so carefully prepared for us at Dalton and regained his railroad communication at Resaca, not an hour too soon for the safety of his army. And then he retreated along the Line of the railroad as far as Cassville, where I know from his own lips since the war that he intended to give us battle."

Throughout the campaign Sherman followed a strategy of turning movements, and on May 25th this resulted in the battle at New Hope Church, "that Hell-hole so well named, whose trees I warrant still bear the marks of the terrible struggle. The hardest fighting of the campaign was during the few days we confronted Johnston at that place: there was no clear ground, it was all a dense thicket and none of us will soon forget the boom of cannon, and the crack of the rifles during those bloody days. We pressed to our left and reached the railroad. The heavy rains then set in. The roads became almost impassable and the wagon trains useless. The soldiers became so besotted with mud that we could scarcely distinguish friend from foe and in that order we came to Kenesaw."

Sherman's assault here was not successful and when Johnston retreated across the Chattahoochee River, Sherman resumed his envelopment tactics. Then Sherman received some interesting news. "One hot July day when I was under the shade of a persimmon tree one of our spies was brought to me who had been inside Atlanta as a cattle trader or drover, and who brought me a newspaper of the day before containing the order relieving Johnston and placing Hood in command of the Rebel army. It became a matter of vital importance that I should know what manner of man was Hood, and I consulted with Schofield and McPherson, both of whom knew him at West Point. And the conclusion we came to was that the change meant fighting."

But within the month Sherman had bottled Hood up in Atlanta and on September 1st the rebels evacuated the city. Sherman would meet Johnston again when the armies treated for peace and the two crusty soldiers would become friends. But in the fall of 1864 Sherman and his soldiers still had work to do. In November they were on the march and heading to the sea.

Being Remembered

ROBERT D. BURNHAMS of Fredericksburg, Virginia, had been a graduate student at the university for two weeks in 1940 when the army cut short his research. In that brief Ann Arbor sojourn he managed to find at the Clements "a fine collection and helpful staff." Forty-one years later he wrote to offer us the gift of his impressive map collection.

When the maps arrived at the library we were struck with their beautiful condition (most of them are hand-colored) and their range, from 1545 to 1779. Ortelius, Munster, Mercator and Blaue are some of the distinguished map makers represented. There are two magnificent early 18th-century Italian town plans included, one appropriately of Naples, where Mr. Burnhams purchased them in 1943.

We are delighted to add these thirty two maps to our collection. Mr. Burnhams' remembrance is deeply appreciated.