The Service of History

In our dreams we occasionally see our Associates carefully preserving all issues of *The Quarto* and re-reading them from time to time. Awake we know better. Consequently we are not going to begin by saying, "Of course, you recall the quotation from our last issue by Dr. J. H. Plumb of Cambridge University..."

Instead we shall summarize what he said: that the major purpose of history is to explain the past for our generation for the sake of deepening human experience and instilling confidence in man's capacity to master his environment. The last phrase we find particularly attractive, because it suggests that in today's gloomy outlook and general pessimism we may be overlooking man's historical ability to solve his problems and so endure. After all he has lasted these thousands of years and steadily improved his living conditions.

Dr. Plumb has enlarged on his thought by declaring that the "history of progress" ought to be the core of historical study: all those technical improvements in mobility, communication, health and medicine, resources of power, building, etc., which have raised our standard of living. The history of progress, he says, would breed confidence in the present and fortify those qualities in man that helped him emerge from caves. He names those qualities as "technical cunning, applied intelligence, and a capacity to risk change."

You will find his stimulating essay in the September issue of *Horizon* magazine.

We are inclined to agree with the professor that this is the kind of history that is relevant for our times. Further, despite the atom bomb, Hitler's systematic slaughtering of the Jews, and two world wars, he believes that anyone who thinks the "old days" of a century ago were better is crazy. The cruelties of the present arouse a horror that contrasts with the complacency which suffered cruelties of the past.

Further, Dr. Plumb is echoing an earlier British historian, George M. Trevelyan, who once pointed out: "It is not man's evolution but his attainment that is the great lesson of the past and the highest theme of history. The deeds themselves are more interesting than their causes and effects, and are fortunately ascertainable with much greater precision. It is the tale of the thing done which trains the political judgment by widening the range of sympathy and deepening the approval and disapproval of conscience; that stimulates by example youth to aspire and age to endure; that enables us by the light of what men once have been, to see the thing we are, and dimly to descry the form of what we should be."

The "tale of the thing done"—this is what we fill the shelves of the Clements Library with. It ought to inspire, caution, demonstrate, provoke, and beckon. Of course, history does not supply all the answers. Man still needs the inspiration and understanding of great literature and religion to be at home in the present and to face the future with confidence. But the great reservoir of historical experience must not be covered up.

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Inflation

At a sale in February of 21 Anthony Wayne manuscripts, the average price realized at auction was almost $270 per item. We were at once tempted to compare that figure with the whopping sum we have paid out for several lots of Wayne manuscripts in the past years (to him as well as from him), with generous help from the Associates. To our agreeable surprise, our average per item is $32.50! It confirms two observable facts: that manuscripts sold in lots are cheaper than single items, and that there has been a tremendous rise in market value of letters from and to Wayne. Any way you look at it, the Associates made a good investment in buying the Wayne material.

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The Fractional Genius

Recent acquisition of more volumes of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* makes our holdings respectable. Although
where. Lundy soon moved his paper to Greenville, Tennessee, for three years, then transferred it to Baltimore. There he hired William Lloyd Garrison to help edit, but the law suits resulting from Garrison’s pen caused them to separate. Lundy moved his paper to Washington and later began to print it in local shops wherever he happened to be. The *Genius* expired at the end of 1835, but was followed by another paper which Lundy edited at Philadelphia. Then in 1838 he moved to Illinois and started the *Genius* again. It ran until his death in 1839. Lundy became perhaps the most active Negro friend and antislavery man of the 1840’s. He was dedicated to his beliefs and made extensive efforts to find foreign locations for Negro colonies. Unfortunately for him, his arguments appealed neither to slaves, free Negroes, slave owners, or abolitionists. The contending parties pulled farther and farther apart until the country was divided.

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**Civil War**

As our Associates know, the Library does not collect actively on the Civil War. We do have a collection on Abraham Lincoln, a gift, and naturally it spills over into the military conflict. And we do not turn down gifts relating to the Civil War.

Just lately Mrs. Albert Love of Flint presented to the Library 72 books on the Civil War, published during the war or shortly afterward, which we were happy to accept. Then from Mr. Shirley Smith’s estate we were given six contemporary titles on the war, and Mrs. Elizabeth G. Brown of Ann Arbor added two more. Suddenly we find our holdings strengthened by 80 solid source books on this tragic era. We know our successor will not complain.

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**Widney’s Maps**

Among the more interesting items in the Map division concerning the War of 1812 are two manuscript maps drawn in 1813 by a young Pennsylvania volunteer named John Widney. The maps are drawn on both sides of a single sheet, and are part of an exchange of information between Widney and Samuel Williams, a better known cartographer and a cousin of Widney.

The two maps concern the seat of war in Niagara and Presqu’Isle, or Erie, and appear to have been drawn before the burning of Buffalo in December of 1813. They are pen and ink sketches and are crudely drawn, but Widney acknowledges this in a covering letter to Williams. “They are done but Roughly” he says, “as my materials were none of the best and I have neither dividers nor scale. Never-the-less it will serve to give you a tolerable good idea of their situations.” Widney had apparently made his observations on a march to Buffalo with the militia in 1813, and was in the process of giving an account of it to Williams when the latter asked for maps of the areas.

The map of Erie is the less informative of the two, although it does show the beginnings of Oliver Hazard Perry’s little fleet. A spot on the shore of the basin formed by Presqu’Isle is labeled “Navy Yard”, and several other labels indicate the presence of troops either to guard the works, or to supply labor for the building of the ships themselves.

The Niagara map is much more detailed, probably because Widney spent some time there as a member of the Pennsylvania Volunteers under General Adamson Tannehill. Widney is mainly concerned with the village of Black Rock, rendezvous point for militia groups from New York and...
Pennsylvania. However, he does locate Fort Erie on the Canadian shore, detachments of American and British forces, and the placement of gun batteries on both banks of the Niagara River.

No other maps by Widney are known to be extant, and it may be that his fears of a sudden end were justified, for he closes his letter to Williams with the words "I remain while Existence shall last, Your affectionate cousin John Widney."

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**Ho for Frisco!**

Associate James Shearer II of Chicago has long been looking after the Western interests of the Library. Through him a great many basic reports of westward expansion before 1865 have come to our shelves. He uses the Wagner-Camp bibliography of overland migration as a guide. His latest gift is a copy of the *Journal of Samuel Rutherford Dundass to California*, in 1849, Steubenville, Ohio, 1857.

Dundass identifies himself as former auditor of Jefferson County, Ohio. He joined the Steubenville Company of sixty who went out to San Francisco to mine for gold. Like thousands of others they were disappointed. Dundass got a job as port inspector and later shipped on a Dutch vessel. It was several years before he returned home to publish this detailed account of his journey. It is a scarce book today.

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**Thomas J. Chew Collection**

Two recent purchases, one by the Associates and the other by the library, have brought us the papers of Thomas J. Chew. Numbering 350 items in all, this collection adds to our holdings in the field of naval history. Chew was a Connecticut Yankee from New London; he entered the navy on March 9, 1809 and served in the office of purser, or paymaster, until about 1836.

A significant portion of his correspondence, almost a third, is from the War of 1812. First assigned to the frigate *John Adams*, Chew was with Captain Isaac Hull on the U.S. Constitution during its classic battle with the Guerrière in August of 1812 and later aboard the ill-fated Chesapeake when its mortally wounded captain, James Lawrence, gasped his stirring "Don’t give up the ship" order. Although there is little in the collection which relates directly to these two signal events, there are many personal references to figures such as Isaac Hull, William Bainbridge, James Lawrence, and Stephen Decatur, as well as letters by Charles Morris, another prominent naval officer, which appear in the correspondence of Chew and his wife, Abby.

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**In Print**

Five new books have appeared this winter by persons who used our Library extensively:

- Wyman W. Parker, *Henry Stevens of Vermont*, N. Israel, Amsterdam.

One of Abby’s letters dated August 15, 1814 relates the British attack on Stonington, Connecticut. As part of their attempt to terrify the coastal towns and throttle the source of the Yankee privateers, the British unleashed a two-day barrage on Stonington with bombs and rockets. After inflicting damage to many of the houses the British were finally frustrated by the staunch little town battery.

As purser, Chew spent a good deal of his time with crew lists and pay accounts in the navy yards of Boston, Portsmouth, and New York. He also acted as an agent in distributing prize money appropriated by Congress to the crews of ships which had brought in, or destroyed, British vessels.

After the war he served on voyages to the Mediterranean and the Carribean. One Mediterranean letter, dated 21 February 1818 describes the effect of an earthquake on the town of Messina in Sicily. Many of the items, however, are purely personal letters of the family. Yet they all contribute toward creating an impression of the anxieties and the frustrations faced by families whose fathers and husbands were away at sea in defense of their country.

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**Academy of Richmond**

One French officer who came over to help us during the American Revolution liked the country so much that he stayed on. He had been well cared for in Virginia while ill, and in 1782 he was only 27. Captain Alexandre-Marie Quesnay de Beaurepaire was interested in teaching, not in continuing his military career. He listened to a suggestion made by John Page, later governor of Virginia, for an American Academy with French professors, but he moved up to
Philadelphia and opened a school there. In 1785 he returned to Richmond and started another school.

There he took up the idea of an American Academy, which would be both a school and a learned society, with branches in other cities and with international correspondence. Part of it was not unlike the French Academy. Beaucaire raised enough money to start a building, then went to France in 1786 to see about a faculty and further support. The Court of France expressed interest in his plan. He talked to Jefferson in Paris, but oddly that educator did not think it practical.

Beaucaire next issued an explanatory pamphlet in 1788 for the French Academy. He followed it with a greatly enlarged second edition and listed his backers and endorsers in Virginia. A third printing followed; the idea was stimulating and gaining an audience. A list of foreign associates was compiled, a committee of correspondence appointed, and a French professor of natural history designated. Then the French Revolution began, and the whole project collapsed. As an ironic footnote, the building back in Richmond was completed and used as a theater before it burned in 1866.

Because Beaucaire's booklet in any edition was published in France and because presumably many copies were destroyed in the revolution, it is extremely scarce in this country. The Library was happy to find a copy of the enlarged edition: Mémoire Statuts et Prospectus Concernant l'Academie des Sciences at Beaux-Arts Establi à Richmond (Paris 1788). Even the printer was designated as printer to the Academy of Richmond!

Someday we hope a scholar will investigate the “fall out” of this idea in the establishment of colleges in America.

Who Was Here

February was a social month at the Library. On the 10th we played host at a morning coffee for wives of visiting Rotarians attending a district meeting in Ann Arbor. They were shown some books, manuscripts, and maps after they were thawed out with coffee. All of them were from southeastern Michigan and southwestern Ontario.

On the 21st the staff entertained members of the History Department at the traditional Washington's Birthday tea.

In connection with this notable birthday, we note that the Library has recently acquired four additional sermons delivered on the occasion of Washington's death, in December 1799. These four bring to 88 the total number of Washington funeral sermons we own. They indicate as well as anything the universal and unfeigned grief of the nation for a man whom everyone recognized for his unrivaled talents as soldier and President.

The Lost Louisiana

With the short-sightedness and constant need for money characteristic of dictators, Napoleon sold Louisiana (which he had taken from Spain with the promise of never alienating it to a third party) to the United States for $15,000,000. The treaty was concluded on April 30, 1803, and was supposed to be confirmed by the French chamber. Napoleon ignored both his own legislature and Spain's protest, and the formal transfer was made on Dec. 20.

The seventh article of the treaty stipulated favored treatment for French and Spanish ships trading to New Orleans for the next twelve years. They would not have to pay any more duties than U. S. ships had to pay at this port.

A Frenchman who had traveled all through the Mississippi Valley, first identified as Boucher de la Richardiere and now as C. E. Wante, published at Paris in 1804 his Mémoires sur la Louisiane with a dissertation on the advantages to France of the seventh article of the treaty, followed by a translation of U. S. comments on the region shortly after acquiring it, and finally raising the question of whether it was advantageous to France to take possession of Louisiana. This latter inquiry appears startling, but he did not mean to seize by force what France had just ceded; rather to establish a lot of Frenchmen in the area to insure a market for French goods.

Apparantly some people in Paris were having second thoughts about Napoleon's wisdom in reducing the empire (as indeed they well might). But after our author examines all the reasons that might favor a colony of Frenchmen in the region, he concludes that the advantages to commerce are dubious and the dangers to international peace are real. He was right. The influx of a large number of French settlers under auspices of Napoleon's government would indeed have aroused suspicions in the United States.

Meanwhile the peace agreed upon between France and England in 1802 was rapidly crumbling, and Napoleon provoked new warfare in 1805. All thoughts of Louisiana vanished from French minds. In fact, the twelve-year free trade privilege expired by the time peace was ultimately made.

The Mémoires sur la Louisiane is an expensive book, but a proper one for the Library to acquire, which it has just done.