

COLLECTORS ON COLLECTING

MASRC LUNCHEON MEETING

¶ Over 50 dealers and their guests attended a special luncheon meeting of the Middle Atlantic States Chapter of the A.B.A.A. on Nov 14 at the "Top of the Six's" (666 Fifth Ave, NYC). Lew D. Feldman (House of El Dieff) chaired the meeting and noted that it was a little more than 10 years ago that a similar meeting had been held by MASRC and that 2 of the 3 speakers were again present. (Frederick B. Adams Jr was unable to attend because of prior engagement). [There was some controversy as to whether the 1951 meeting had been a luncheon or a dinner. For the record, it took place at the Hotel Abbey, Jan 19, 1951, Friday night, and was recorded in the Jan 27, 1951 AB]. Setting and food were excellent, and despite the rain there was a good view of NYC scrapers from the 39th floor of the "Top of the Six's", Stouffer's showplace. (Arrangements had again been in the capable hands of Judy Cohen of Argosy Book Stores).

The speakers included Mrs Arthur C. Holden, collector of books on woman's role in the making of history, who stated: "There is a funny quirk going on in the publishing houses today about publishing women's books. What is needed badly is a publisher who will publish books on and by women." C. Waller Barrett was introduced by Lew Feldman as one who "in the past 15 years has given over 500 talks on book collecting. There is not a single antiquarian bookseller in U.S. who has not sold or corresponded with C. Waller Barrett, collector of American creative literature." John D. Gordan (Berg Collection, NYPL) was the final speaker as he had "double problem: English as well as American literature."
[Full reports of talks follow:]

COLLECTING BOOKS ON WOMEN *Miriam Y. Holden*

Mr. Chairman and Friendly Book Dealers:

No doubt you are surprised to see me here today and it is likely that you are wondering why I have been asked to speak to you.

Speaking, I know, is definitely not my line. I have always preferred to be on the listening end, where I was free to enjoy and welcome an opportunity to learn. In fact, I have never spoken to any group about my books until a year ago when the Hroswitha Club, an organization of women book collectors from various cities in the East, asked me to put on an exhibition of some of my books. It seemed best to explain my collection so I prepared a talk which I read to fellow members informally by my fireside with my pug dog snoring beside me. This is quite a different sort of occasion.

When Madeleine Stern invited me to come to your meeting as her guest to hear your distinguished speakers, I naturally accepted immediately. Then to my dismay she asked me if I would tell you briefly the purpose of my collection of books dealing with the records of Woman's Role in Civilization, her political,

legal and economic status, and her progress in education, science, culture and religions—what fields I had attempted to cover and why, and what needs such a collection was intended to serve.

I will try to tell you a bit of this story briefly, but before I begin I want you to know how I really welcome most of all this opportunity to be able to thank you collectively for all that you have done for me in the role of book searchers and as book dealers to make my library possible. The dealers play a very important role in every collection and I find it difficult to find words to express how truly grateful I am for your help, interest, advice and the encouragement which you have so generously given to me during the twenty-five years that I have been collecting material for my library.

When I was a beginner I had time to browse in your shops and to learn from you and your shelves, and was able to know you personally. I can remember climbing to your loft buildings or descending to your cellars where one could hear the hurrying footsteps on the sidewalks overhead, and I can recall shivering in the cold in front of your sidewalk bookstalls. Some of you I have never met face to face—you are still voices on long distance calls—and most of you I know only through our correspondence and through your catalogs. I must add I find catalogs are quite revealing of the dealers' salesmanship, and their reverence for books.

Not only does the dealer help the collector by supplying additional eyes to search for wanted items, but when several dealers learn the collector's wants, it is self evident that the growth of the collection is aided.

There is another subtle help that I find the dealer gives. In his desire to make a sale, he is prone to suggest related categories and this develops and broadens the collector's field.

VALUE OF CATALOGS

I marvel at the painstaking work and effort which must go into the making of every catalog. I hope you get some comfort in your labors in realizing the tremendous educational value that the collector will derive from your catalogs.

The fun of seeking and securing becomes for the collector almost a form of sport. I enjoy being lured on, in spite of myself, by your unending flood of tempting catalogs in every language and from all corners of the earth. I wish to heaven, though, that you would date your catalogs. What a joy it would be.

The catalogs that are entirely on the subject of Women I always keep on file, for they have a bibliographical value for me. Schulte's book store was the first in New York City that I know about to devote an entire catalog to Women. I remember his amazement when it sold like hot cakes. He thereafter had a special section in his store on Women, and others did the same when the women's colleges such as Smith and Radcliffe began to buy books for their libraries.

Do any of you remember the beautiful catalog Maggs Bros. in London got out many years ago? Catalog No. 829, called "Shall We Join the Ladies, A Catalog of Books By and About Woman." He dated it, bless him, October 1955, so I can tell you how long ago that was. Last year at your Book Fair, I found another copy of this catalog now selling for \$5.00 which I bought.

I think it is only fair to tell you that when I started to buy books I never intended to become a collector. Nothing was further from my mind. I never said to myself, as the books on collecting advise one to do, "Shall I collect authors, shall I have a cabinet collection, or shall I have a subject collection?"

I bought books only because they contained information I wanted.

I grew up in Boston—we lived on Marlborough Street within walking distance of the Boston Public Library and the Boston Athenaeum. I loved the world of books and I read avidly. I read for the joy of reading and because I was continually discovering and was aware of how much I didn't know. I attended and graduated from Miss Mays School for young ladies where I was taught to say my prayers in French. It could have been the marks on my report cards that helped to give me this awareness of how much I didn't know. While still in school I do remember I was given charge of a children's library on Saturdays at the Emmanuel House Settlement which I ran for several years.

I came to New York when I married and became interested in the problems of the Negro in New York. Again I needed to know something I didn't know. So my first collection was of books about the Negro which I still own. From learning about the discriminations existing against Negroes, I became aware that there were also many laws in the United States that still discriminated against women and that women through the ages had fared badly in various parts of the world and in different periods of history. I began to buy books that would inform me on this subject and I realized as I searched that throughout the ages men had recorded with care the achievements of men and that all too few records of the story of women had been kept. It had occurred to very few women that they had a significant role to play in keeping the records of women.

The late Mary Beard wrote an article that impressed me very much, "What Nobody Seems to Know About Woman." In it she said, "The sharpest distinction between women and men in our society and in our age is the large amount of attention paid by men to their species in long history, as opposed to the lack of attention paid by women to theirs. Out of considerable knowledge of men, and little if any knowledge of women, men educate young people only in regard to the force *men* have exerted upon history."

This I found to be true when my son brought home from school his book on American History. It contained only *one* mention of a woman. There was a picture of Dolly Madison with a caption under it which read: "She was the charming wife of a president."

Is truth about history important? If so, how can historic truth be established if the history of women is unknown? Is social history of value? If so, what is social history from which the social history of women is eliminated? How can history be completely interpreted if only men come into review? What nobody still seems to know about woman, even in this midpoint of the twentieth century, is the reality of her historic meaning as a potent agent in creating the patterns of the society which are known to history.

To reveal woman's role in the making of history has been the purpose of my library. I am trying to collect and make available to historians, students, and writers, the records of woman's role in history.

I do not collect books because they are rare or because of their value. I collect them only because I hope they contain within them some significant records of women that will be meaningful to those who are seeking and using them.

Obviously I do not have adequate resources nor the space to collect original Babylonian tablets or scrolls of Egyptian papyrus, nor prehistoric relics nor Medieval manuscripts. I can, however, recognize that scholarship has collected the record of woman's position in primitive society and in ancient times. I have therefore tried to assemble a representative record of these women of the early periods. This section contains books concerning prehistoric women, and tells the stories of the gods and goddesses on the Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian tablets. In this section are the books by Frazier, Briffault's three volumes of "The Mother," Neuman's "The Great Mother," and Bachhoffen's two-volume "Mutterrecht," etc.

Another section contains the story of women in ancient societies, Egypt, Greece and Rome. There is a section on the Early Christian women, the story of their life in the convents and their work as deaconesses in the churches and as founders and workers in the hospitals.

A section covers the Middle Ages which shows the trades that women worked at and the political power of the Lady Abbesses who were overlords of immense properties and sent their armies into battle. By the tenth century we find Hroswitha writing her seven dramas in Latin. In the fourteenth century I have such women as Herrad who produced her illuminated manuscript, "The Garden of Delights."

The Renaissance period which was the time of great intellectual energy for men and women is represented by many interesting books, thanks to the travels of Leona Rostenberg and Madeleine Stern. The French and Italian women include the works of Madame Guion, Christine de Pisan, Louise de Labe, Vittoria Colonna, and Georgette de Montenay, the first women to publish an Emblem book. These I also owe to them.

The early English literary women, as well as the Scotch, Irish, European, and Asiatic women, have sections on the shelves. The actresses, musicians, and women in the arts I have tried to cover.

I have recently developed and still am working on a large section on the Jewish women, a subject that has been completely overlooked as a group in most libraries. It was necessary to build this up to be able to include them in bibliographies which I am called on to supply from time to time.

My American section is by far the largest, principally because it is the section that is most used by researchers today.

Seven Gables, Argosy, Goodspeed's, and Leon Kramer have been particularly helpful to me in building this section and I want to thank them for their many years of effort. Tuttle's and Howgate's Book Store catalogs have been also of great help to me.

This American section begins with the American Indian woman, goes through the Colonial, Revolutionary, Civil War, Western travels, and literary women to the nineteenth century. The anti-slavery period and the mill workers, the temperance and the suffrage women, the first doctors and scientists, and the women who fought for and promoted education. The editors of magazines, the philanthropic women, and the struggle for suffrage and women's property rights, are some of the subjects covered. The women's club movements, the woman's journals, and Martha Lamb histories of New York, the women's peace movements, and the women in utopian communities are also represented as are the women ministers and the women leaders of religious sects and women "firsts" in various other professions.

Recently, since the women's colleges have started collections of books about women, I have had more and more competition in buying in my field. I no longer can wait to write a letter for items which I want in a catalog but must phone immediately, sometimes only to find Goodspeed has already bought it for Radcliffe or someone has bought it for Smith.

Private collectors today do have a problem to compete in the market of books with the foundation-supported or endowed universities. The prices on many items have today more than doubled since I started to collect twenty-five years ago, and the material is becoming scarcer and scarcer. Rarely do I see a Mercy Warren item or a Hannah Adams item any more, and I'm glad I completed my Lydia Maria Child and Lowell Offering sections years ago. No more Frances Wright books and less and less material on the market to be had on the suffrage period. The Library of Congress is getting more and more of it. This is as it should be, it seems to me, because the public libraries, the historical societies, and the university libraries are better equipped to take permanent care of these out-of-print books.

LIBRARY ARRANGEMENT OF COLLECTIONS

However, it is of concern to me that books which are of particular interest in the history of woman's contribution to civilization as they go into academic and public libraries are not being arranged as they can be arranged and kept together even in the limited space of my own home. I think the primary usefulness of a library such as mine is that it tells the story

of woman's contribution by reclassification of subject divisions that I have outlined. It is possible to group books of a subject library by shelves and cases in ways that seem to add a new significance and reveal a new relatedness of the books to the subdivisions of women's activity. Scholars who have worked in my library tell me it is an easy library to use and one that is thought provoking.

In contrast many years ago it was suggested that I write to Rollins College to ascertain what had become of the collection of books about women that had been given the library by Mrs. Edgerton Parsons. The answer came that they had been distributed on the shelves according to the requirements of the Dewey decimal system. Therefore no information could be given about the collection as a whole unless I gave the names of particular books in which I was interested. Even Smith College has faced this same problem. At Smith, however, a very complete card index has been the remedy for the enforced dissipation of the important Sophia Smith Collection about women. I should mention in passing the important Galatea Collection formed by Thomas Wentworth Higginson and given to the Boston Public Library in 1896 as a permanent memorial to woman's struggle for recognition, and stipulated to be kept in an alcove by themselves.

It may be inevitable that books on the shelves of the large library must be arranged according to the over-all policies of library administration. This does not facilitate the study of the role of woman and the understanding of the problems that she has faced, and still does face, in winning for herself economic and social status in the society of our day.

By way of remedy, I call attention to the need for bibliographical work in the field of women's achievement. By the assembly and publication of bibliographical lists arranged so as to reveal the significance of women's achievement and opportunity in a fresh light, it is my hope that the great libraries may compensate for their self-imposed adherence to the Dewey decimal system. Of course trained scholars can do surprisingly good work from cards, but it is my belief that the best bibliographies and certainly the most significant and the most inspiring, must be based upon a knowledge of and contact with the books themselves.

Again I thank my collaborators, the searchers for and dealers in books, who have helped me to assemble my library. It is delightful to be a collector. I still have much to learn.

—AB QUOTE—

Dancing in public on holidays also is prohibited under the Massachusetts blue laws. Thus, college students faced the possibility of breaking the law at traditional dances after tomorrow's Harvard-Princeton football game in Cambridge. But Cambridge Mayor Edward Crane, Harvard Class of 1935, hit upon a solution. Taking advantage of a provision in the law, he has ruled the Harvard gatherings really are not dances but family rituals—and thus can be held legally.

—Wall St Journal (Nov 10, 1961)