

GIFTS AND ACQUISITIONS

THE WEST JERSEY SOCIETY

A name well known to students of New Jersey settlement and colonial history is that of the West Jersey (or West *New* Jersey) Society. At the age of two hundred and thirty-one years, after an extended period of inactivity, it rendered up its corporate ghost in 1923, and the priceless accumulation of records, covering the Society's operations in New Jersey and elsewhere from 1692, was deposited at that time in the Public Record Office, in London. As an aid to American historians, the Rutgers University Library has undertaken to have the entire series of West Jersey Society records microfilmed—one hundred bundles and volumes, including minutes, correspondence, accounts, etc. Dr. Roy F. Nichols, '18, Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania and recently Visiting Professor at Cambridge University, has made the necessary arrangements. The project is now well under way. More than a quarter of the whole has been completed, and the remainder is expected to be available shortly.

New Jersey was once the possession of James, Duke of York, who conveyed it in 1664 to John Berkeley and George Carteret. A division was made in 1676, by which Carteret received East Jersey, and Berkeley's successors West Jersey. The ownership of each of "the Jerseys" soon was divided into a number of equal shares, or proprietries, whose possessors, the Proprietors, then formed governing boards to conduct the business of their respective corporations. Some of the proprietries subsequently were sold and re-sold, in many cases further divided into fractional shares.

The largest shareholder of West Jersey was Dr. Daniel Coxe, who had acquired some twenty proprietries, a fifth of the total. On March 4, 1691/2, he conveyed most of his holdings in the colony, including the West Jersey proprietries and two proprietries of East Jersey, together with tracts in Chester County, Pennsylvania, and in New England, to a body of forty-eight men, most of them London citizens. To this corporation, the West Jersey Society, the purchase represented the beginning of a huge real estate enterprise (originally certain governmental powers were involved also).

In June, 1692, an agent was appointed by the Society to manage its affairs in New Jersey. He and his successors supervised the laying out of tracts as the West Jersey Council of Proprietors declared their

periodic dividends of land. Disposition of the Society's holdings varied. In some cases, sizable tracts were conveyed to speculators or investors, who either utilized the natural resources or divided and re-sold the land. In a great many other cases, smaller parcels were leased and sold to individual farmers.

Although the West Jersey Society possessed land elsewhere in the colony, its most substantial holdings fell within the present bounds of Cape May and Hunterdon counties. All of the former, indeed, belonged at one time to the Society. The Hunterdon land, known as "the Society's Great Tract," amounted to nearly 100,000 acres, about a third of the county.

The Society was an English company and it experienced the customary disadvantages of absentee proprietorship. On occasion the London gentlemen doubted the efficiency, if not the honesty, of their American agents. Moreover, squatters plagued the Society; at one point, in fact, during the 1730's, it considered selling out its holdings and abandoning the enterprise. In any case, by the 1750's a large part of the property had been disposed of, and the Cape May and Hunterdon remnants were sold during that decade. Benjamin B. Cooper purchased the remaining lands and rights in New Jersey in 1814.

Although accounts of the West Jersey Society have appeared in print, they are incomplete and sometimes inaccurate. With its full records available, not only the intricate dealings of the Society, but also certain dim phases in the history of colonial New Jersey can now be studied. Useful supplements to the records of the corporation itself are the Library's Morris and Johnston papers. Among the agents and attorneys of the West Jersey Society were Lewis Morris, Lewis Johnston, and Robert Morris.

NEWSPAPERS

The Library is gratified to announce again the gift of a substantial publisher's file of newspapers. Through the kindness of Mr. W. H. Farrand, its publisher, and of Mr. D. Howard Moreau, of Flemington, N.J., a virtually complete file of the *Milford* (N.J.) *Leader* has been received. The paper was established in 1880, and, with the exception of less than three years, the set is unbroken to the present

year: March 1880-April 1898, March 1900-Feb. 1908, March 1909-March 1949.

Additional volumes of the *Columbian Sentinel* (Boston) have been acquired. With numerous scattered issues for other years, the Library's files are essentially complete for the following periods: Feb.-Dec. 1792, Jan. 1794-Dec. 1795, Jan. 1799-Dec. 1800, Jan. 1802-Dec. 1803, Jan.-Dec. 1805, Jan. 1809-Dec. 1813, Jan.-Dec. 1823, Jan.-Dec. 1827, Jan. 1829-Nov. 1830. With a newly added volume, the Library now has Oct. 1800-Dec. 1803 of the *Boston Gazette*.

It was recorded a year ago that Mr. Robert C. Crane, publisher of the *Elizabeth* (N.J.) *Daily Journal*, had presented to the Library, along with the original papers, a complete microfilm copy (409 reels) of the *Journal's* office file. We wish to note here that the Library has received regularly, as a continuing measure of his interest and generosity, microfilm copies of all subsequent issues of the *Journal*.

MANUSCRIPTS

Besides the gifts listed below, there are two other manuscript acquisitions: the Henry Martyn Hamilton papers, 1853-1939 (206 items), of New Jersey and Iowa interest; and camp, clothing, and equipage returns of Co. F, 11th New Jersey Infantry, 1862-1865 (56 items).

To the following notes it may be added that, with the manuscript Tuckerton Railroad Company papers, the gift of Miss Eleanor B. Price, the Library has received nine printed annual reports, as well as other pamphlets, broadsides, and an assortment of tickets of the same railroad. Mr. Holmes V. M. Dennis, III, has presented many books and pamphlets, together with numerous clippings, and several manuscript items and other memorabilia of his grandfather, Hon. Benjamin F. Howell, and of his father, Holmes V. M. Dennis, Jr. (Rutgers, '94).

Marjorie Brothington:

Dennis family papers (Monmouth Co., N.J.), 1696-1785;
14 items.

Clarkson A. Cranmer, '16:

John H. Whitenack papers, 1797-1891; 31 items.

William Paterson, legal opinion of May 1, 1776.

Holmes V. M. Dennis, III:

Peter G. Conover papers, 1705-1850; 10 items.

Mrs. W. D. Morrison:

Charles Bartolette Stout, diary, 1861-1903; 9 vols.

Miss Eleanor B. Price:

Tuckerton Railroad Company, reports, etc., 1870-1937; 73 items.

Herbert Smith:

Smith family papers (Huntington, L.I.), 1695-1798; 33 items.

WANTED

The first American general sporting periodical was William T. Porter's *Spirit of the Times; a Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage*. Established in 1831, it became an outstanding publication of its day. The Rutgers Library lacks, or has incomplete: vols. 1-6, 13-14, 16, 18-23, 26, 29-31.

CORRECTION

Richard Amacher, author of a note on the *New Jersey Magazine* in the December, 1948, *Journal*, writes that he was led into the error of calling this "New Jersey's First Magazine" by a mistaken reference to it as "the state's first magazine" in Lyon N. Richardson's *A History of Early American Magazines* (p. 273).