

# GIFTS AND ACQUISITIONS

## TEN THOUSAND MANUSCRIPTS

With the constant addition of useful, and sometimes rare, materials, the Library's collections continue to grow in every department. For this issue of the *Journal*, however, we intend to write only of manuscripts. During the six months since our last report, there have been forty-six manuscript accessions, large or small, totaling over ten thousand pieces.

Several years ago we gave an account of the West New Jersey Society, whose records had been filmed for the Library. This English corporation, dating from the 1690's, once owned a fifth of the West Jersey proprietary shares, controlling vast tracts of West Jersey land. The remoteness of their holdings, and other difficulties, yielded the London gentlemen more headaches than profit. In 1814 they happily conveyed in one parcel all their proprietary interest in New Jersey. The buyer was Benjamin B. Cooper, Esq.

Little has been known of Cooper. There is virtually nothing biographical concerning him in print, but one is astonished in the course of other research to find him mentioned in relation to business projects of uncommon size. The Library has had for some years a few of Cooper's papers, among them an anonymous four-page address of about 1830 supporting his candidacy for Congress. This crude eulogy touches many points in his career which spark the reader's curiosity. It is not, however, his political life—a fairly commonplace one—which stirs the fancy, but rather his extraordinary dealings in land.

Cooper, a well-to-do young farmer of Gloucester County, is said to have begun his operations as a land speculator in 1803. In the next thirty years he was concerned in literally thousands of such transactions, ranging not only throughout South Jersey and up the Delaware into Sussex County, but reaching also far into virgin Pennsylvania lands, in huge tracts scattered through some eight western counties of that state. Before the West Jersey purchase in 1814 Cooper was thus already a well-known and experienced land operator. Aside from extensive private dealings, he had undertaken successfully the management of both Penn and Pemberton family holdings in New Jersey, forcing settlements from squatters and otherwise translating liabilities into profits. And amid all this activity, his rest-

less eye still cast about for worthy new fields to conquer. In 1809 he engaged with the Holland Land Company in even greater operations, which were to strain his energies and financial resources.

The story of this complex association awaits the scholar in sixteen boxes of Benjamin B. Cooper papers which the Library has received from his great-granddaughter, Mrs. Henrietta Cooper Wood Calcott. Most of the material relates to Cooper's multifarious dealings in land, and over half of it concerns the Holland Company's Pennsylvania tracts. He not only acted for a time as its agent, but bought, in several purchases between 1809 and 1816, more than half of the Company's million-odd acres east of the Allegheny River. A preliminary study of the papers—patents, deeds, surveys, leases, agents' reports, accounts, etc.—shows that Cooper, despite vigorous exertions, was unable to hold all the land. Nevertheless, from lists made following his death in 1835 it appears that he still owned about 170,000 acres in Pennsylvania alone.

These papers include other valuable material: notes on local history and genealogy; a few records of the Baker Gold & Silver Mining Company (1867), alleged owners of some Idaho mines; correspondence and documents concerning the development of Peters Beach and nearby shore properties; etc. Mrs. Calcott presented also a small group of John Nice papers. The most notable of these is a six-page war reminiscence of Captain Nice, reviewing four months of active service in the Revolution with Pennsylvania troops, which ended with his capture and eventual release.

Mr. Clarkson A. Cranmer ('16) has added thirty-seven pieces, 1763-1895, to the Peter I. Stryker papers presented by him earlier. Stryker was a Somerset County (N.J.) doctor, admitted to practice in 1790. This busy gentleman served in the legislature and in other political activities, was a general of militia, administered numerous estates, and wrote poetry.

Another medical person whose public services carried him even farther was Dr. Ferdinand S. Schenck (1790-1860), who lived on a farm just west of Franklin Park, N.J. Schenck, as a matter of fact, began his medical training under Dr. Stryker, finishing at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York. During fifty years of successful practice, he found time to carry on an active political life as well, rising through the legislature to serve two terms in Congress during the 1830's, finally becoming an Errors and Appeals judge.

Through arrangements made by Mr. G. Clifford Nevius, a student of the Jersey Dutch and a particularly loyal friend of the Library, Dr. Schenck's papers have been presented to the Library by Mr. James C. Dunn, a descendant. This is a sizable collection—about 130 folders and over thirty manuscript volumes—in which much valuable research material has been found. Most outstanding is the block of political correspondence covering the period of Dr. Schenck's Congressional service, which will be the subject of a later article in the *Journal*. The account books include all of his medical ledgers, 1811-59, and several daybooks. There are three folders of notes on cases heard before the Errors and Appeals Court, among them one involving the Camden and Amboy Railroad.

Estate papers make up much of the bulk. As a respected man in the community, he was named to administer many estates. The largest was that of his relative, Jacob A. Van Deventer, a New Brunswick clothing merchant who died in 1839, leaving a second store in St. Louis. Among the papers concerning this involved estate are eighty-four letters written to Van Deventer, 1836-39, by his associates in the St. Louis store, in which their operations and business conditions generally in that city are discussed.

Among the five thousand or so items are papers of the Doctor's father, Martin Schenck (1770-1823), blacksmith, legislator, justice of the peace, county judge, and sheriff of Somerset County for several terms. The many executions, vendue lists, etc., of Sheriff Schenck are found to explain one of the mysteries concerning Somerville's first newspaper. One reason so little is known of it and so few copies have been saved is that John C. Kelley, the proprietor, was sold out for debt in the summer of 1815.

Miss Louise Hartshorne, of Middletown, N.J., has presented the John Schureman papers, 31 items, 1799-1817. Most of these are letters relating to Reformed Church affairs. Dr. Schureman, a Queen's College (Rutgers) graduate of 1795, was a minister of that church, and a taste of its inner politics can be had from these letters.

Thomas Gibbons (1757-1826) is little known today, except for his part in the famous suit involving steamboat monopoly rights in the waters between New York and New Jersey. His life story, however, would be excellent material for a novel. An uncommonly shrewd and determined man, he began as a lawyer in Charleston, South Carolina, shortly becoming a prosperous and somewhat feared

person with at least one successful duel to his credit. During the early 1800's he removed to Elizabethtown, N.J., more or less in retirement, but shortly became interested in steamboat transportation.

To the few Gibbons family papers already in its collection, the Library has added 265 pieces, 1767-1897. While the material is incomplete and runs but lightly through several generations of the family, it reveals that Thomas Gibbons and his descendants were exceedingly wealthy people. Many of the papers are South Carolina deeds. There are several marriage contracts to which Gibbons women were parties—the family took no chances on the depredations of fortune-hunters in the Gibbons coffers. Most interesting is the later correspondence involving William H. Gibbons (grandson of Thomas), Frank Lathrop, and Ward McAllister.

Manuscript accessions during the past half-year cannot all be listed here; however, some additional ones may be noted briefly: The diary of Governor John Reading (1686-1767); largely financial records, 1754-67, Hunterdon County, etc., N.J. Genealogical compilations of Hon. Charles H. Winfield, class of 1852, of Jersey City, chiefly on the Winfield family; gift of Mrs. Jay D. Northrup. Andrew J. Disbrow papers; letters received (part political), etc., Middlesex County, N.J., 1845-89, 24 items presented by Mr. Howard A. Krumwiede. Minutes and other papers of the League of Women Voters of New Brunswick and Vicinity; two boxes, 1936-53, a gift of the League.

Donors of other manuscript material are: Mrs. William D. Morrison, Dr. William H. S. Demarest ('83), Dr. J. Milton French, Miss Mabel Gaston, Dr. C. Rexford Davis ('28), John Gibb Smith, G. Clifford Nevius, Mrs. Jeanne T. Reock.

A rare (probably unique) Revolutionary broadside of 1775 has been acquired. Printed in Dutch and English, it is an address of the Bergen County freeholders and inhabitants: "Being fully convinced that the Preservation of the Rights and Privileges of the British Colonies in America, now depends on the firm Union of their inhabitants . . . We . . . Do resolve, that we will not submit," etc. Other broadsides have been received, in part along with manuscripts presented. A box of American World War I posters, supporting Liberty Bonds, etc., is the gift of Mr. F. Nason Manley. In addition, several hundred printed bills of the New Jersey legislature, largely of 1824, 1829-31 and 1858, have been acquired.

D.A.S.