

LIBRARY EXHIBITS

The Library has featured three main exhibits during the past year. Most of the materials used are from the Special Collections department and include books, manuscripts, broadsides, pictures, newspapers, and museum objects. Exhibit titles for 1970-71 were, chronologically, "Dissent in America, 1492-1970," "New Jersey in Retrospect—A Pictorial Essay," and "Crime, Law, and Order in New Jersey, 1681-1970."

Since dissent is becoming more conspicuous in contemporary American society, this topic was considered to be a timely one. The exhibit was set up in October 1970, at a time when political dissent was manifesting itself to an unusual degree in the congressional elections. Based on a definition of dissent as "intense opposition to a majority decision or a long-established social, political, economic, or religious institution," the exhibit focused on the premise that dissent has played an integral part in the history of America since the early days of exploration. In fact, dissent was portrayed as having begun with the voyages of Columbus. Some other areas of dissent highlighted were the Boston Massacre of 1770; the Boston Tea Party of 1773; the Loyalist opposition to the American Revolution; Shays' Rebellion of 1786-87; the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794; the Hartford Convention of 1814-15; the South's secession from the Union in 1860; the Abolition, Prohibition, Populist, and Progressive movements; the Ku Klux Klan; and current anti-war activities. Prominent dissenters included John Quincy Adams, Nathaniel Bacon, John Brown; John C. Calhoun; Thomas Dorr, Anne Hutchinson, Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wallace, and John Peter Zenger. Aside from its informative value, it is hoped that this exhibit has helped some people relate the dissent problems of the past to those of the present in order to achieve a better understanding of the latter.

A touch of nostalgia and frustration pervaded the year's second exhibit, as the viewing public was exposed to pictures of the state's twenty-one counties as they looked at the turn of the century. The exhibit's purpose was threefold. First, it was an attempt to remind people that New Jersey was not always associated with factories, traffic, and sprawling suburbs. Second was a desire to reinforce the need for environmental protection. The third purpose was to instruct viewers that New Jersey is a more diverse state than is often realized,

with each of its twenty-one counties being unique. This diversity amply demonstrates that rural areas reminiscent of the past can coexist with the industrial mazes of the present within the confines of one small state. "New Jersey in Retrospect—A Pictorial Essay" seemed to appeal to a broader spectrum of people than most preceding exhibits. Perhaps this was due to the pictorial nature of the material and the corresponding de-emphasis on explanatory captions, the awe generated by the scenes few expected could ever have existed, or the familiarity of the majority of viewers with at least one of the local areas portrayed. Most likely, a combination of these three elements contributed to the exhibit's success.

The subject of crime, always an intriguing one, is becoming increasingly more relevant and timely. For this reason it was chosen as the topic for the Library's current exhibit, "Crime, Law, and Order in New Jersey, 1681-1970." The materials displayed are rich and varied and highlight some of the major areas in the history of crime in this state. Individual pieces range from a 1681 act outlining punishment for criminals to a 1970 Republican campaign broadside decrying the license often given to organized crime in New Jersey. Of particular interest is the material on the famous Hall-Mills murder case of 1922-26. Such objects as original letters from the protagonists, pictures, newspapers, and the edited galley proofs of a Rutgers University student publication censored for satirizing the case, are exhibited. Other noteworthy display items include seventeenth-century manuscript court records, and eighteenth-century petitions relating to slaves and debtors; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reward posters; the correspondence of an early electric chair manufacturer; materials on the Lindbergh kidnapping case; contemporary crime studies and reports; broadsides and manuscript minute books of several local vigilance societies; and a host of grizzly nineteenth-century murder accounts. As might be expected, the crime exhibit has generated a great deal of interest. In addition, it has probably proved quite informative to many.

Apart from the main exhibits, two smaller displays were featured this past year in conjunction with specific events held at the Library. The annual meeting of the Canal Society of New Jersey occasioned a display entitled "The Canal Era in New Jersey," and appropriate mementoes were exhibited at the centennial meeting of the New Brunswick Historical Club.