

# Review Articles

**Independent Historical Societies, An Enquiry into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future.** By Walter Muir Whitehill. Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1962. xvii, 593p. \$12.50.

In the annals of American historical scholarship, no single group of institutions has loomed larger in importance than the major state and regional historical societies. Since 1791, when the Massachusetts Historical Society was founded, these organizations have pursued diligently the gathering and preserving of historical source materials without which a great deal of American history could not have been written. As historical research libraries they have been of primary importance in making possible a better understanding of the American past.

How these societies developed, what they have accomplished, and how we may expect to see them develop in the future are the questions to which Walter Muir Whitehill addresses himself in this book. Although the title of the book would seem to indicate that the author was concerned only with independent societies which operate without benefit of public funds—societies like the Boston Athenaeum, of which he is the very capable director—Mr. Whitehill actually has given us an erudite and comprehensive view of the whole historical society movement. The emphasis is on the independents, but he gives a great deal of attention to the non-independent societies and agencies which derive all or part of their support from public funds.

Dealing primarily with societies on the state and regional level, he describes their research facilities, publications, membership policies, and financial conditions. He also evaluates their past contributions and makes recommendations for their future development. His book is based on a study which he made of these societies in 1959-60 under a grant from the Council on Library Resources. It is an extremely valuable and excellently written analysis of these historical societies, and will be of immediate and practical value to those who work for or with these societies, and for all who would under-

stand better the nature of these organizations.

For all its good points—and this volume has them in abundance—*Independent Historical Societies* should be used with caution. Mr. Whitehill's reporting of the activities and programs of the nation's historical societies is generally accurate and perceptive, but his evaluation of these activities is essentially one-sided. This is because he represents only one of the two dominant present-day philosophies of historical society operation. Mr. Whitehill's view is that of the major independents, which maintain that the proper role of a society is to collect, preserve, and interpret manuscripts, books, and other materials which serve an essentially academic scholarly purpose. The broader view, held by many others, is that the society not only must serve these needs of the scholar but must also serve, in a variety of ways, the needs and interests of a great many nonscholars in the area which it serves.

Mr. Whitehill has a right to his opinions regarding the proper role of an historical society, but it seems to this reviewer that he is less than charitable in his evaluation of those societies which do not follow the pattern of the major independents. For example, he justifies the limiting of memberships by independent societies on the grounds that this will reduce the total cost of membership benefits, but he caustically applies the term "togetherness" to the efforts of other societies to attract a large membership and thereby reduce the unit costs of these benefits. He does not criticize the independent societies for restricting use of their facilities to members and credential-bearing scholars, but he levels a good deal of criticism at those societies which engage in such "peripheral" activities as historymobiles, junior historical societies, historic sites and markers, and other programs, in an effort to serve the needs of the nonscholar. He does not criticize the independent societies for not taking advantage of new developments in the graphic arts in the publication of their scholarly journals, but he applies the term "popularizing" to other societies that have used illustrations, artwork, color, and even

magazine format in the attempt to secure a wider reading audience. Going further, Mr. Whitehill maintains that this "sociability by participation" is usually "at the expense of scholarship"—a statement which, in this reviewer's opinion, is not borne out by the facts—and he says nothing on the question of whether drab appearance and unimaginative presentation are not major impediments to the wider reading of historical journals.

The crux of the matter is that Mr. Whitehill—and presumably the independent societies he admires so much—believes that "it is only the serious workers that count, and their numbers will always be small." Opposed to this view are many equally respected leaders and societies who believe that the number of people who "count" is very great indeed. Mr. Whitehill's book is a very informative and beautifully written report on the historical societies of the United States, and it is an eloquent exposition of the philosophy of the major independents. Those societies that pursue a broader range of activity will be fortunate indeed if their side of the story can someday be presented by as gifted and accomplished a scholar.—*William T. Alderson, Tennessee State Librarian and Archivist.*

**Special Libraries: How to Plan and Equip Them.** Chester M. Lewis, ed. New York: Special Libraries Association, 1963. (SLA Monograph No. 2) vi, 117p. \$5.55.

The past decade has witnessed a "population explosion" of special libraries, most of which serve clientele in the sciences, engineering, or business. Over ten thousand such libraries (including those in governmental and academic institutions) are listed in Kruzas' *Directory of Special Libraries and Information Centers*. While more and more of these libraries, and the new ones just starting, have the benefit of professional librarians, too many have been administered, planned, and equipped by individuals who do not have the requisite skills and training for this work. Since the supply of experienced librarians is limited and the curricula of the library schools neglect to a large degree the problems inherent in planning and equipping small, specialized libraries, it is heartening to find a publication which speaks directly to this point.

The New York chapter of the Special Libraries Association, with Chester M. Lewis acting as editor, is to be congratulated for producing the present work which is based on a symposium on library planning held by the chapter in 1958. To the ten papers presented at the conference, four have been added. In addition, ten case histories have been included, most of which were originally printed in *Special Libraries*. An annotated bibliography on library planning, a directory of suppliers, and a subject index complete the text, which is well illustrated.

The editor wisely has not attempted a revision of Jackson's *Technical Libraries* but has limited the content to the physical planning and equipping of libraries. Inevitably, in a work of this kind, there is a certain amount of duplication between a few of the papers (e.g., Randall's paper on steel shelving and Price's on metal library equipment). On the whole, such duplication has been kept to a minimum. Somewhat disturbing, however, are contradictory statements which are permitted to stand without editorial comment. On page five it is suggested that an allowance of six to seven volumes per running foot for monograph titles be made and four to five for bound periodicals. On page seventeen a range from six to ten is suggested, and no differentiation between monographs and journals is indicated.

Similarly, on page five it is noted that the floor loading of books plus shelving varies from 110 to 140 pounds per square foot. On page forty-eight the figure of 140 pounds per square foot, exclusive of shelving is given. This can be most important, particularly if the library is located on the upper floors of an office-type structure. The library planner should be warned to give careful attention to this point.

As would be expected, the quality of the papers varies from writer to writer, both in content and style. The bibliography on planning appears reasonably complete and up-to-date. The directory of suppliers is useful but perhaps superfluous, the same information being obtainable elsewhere. The index is good. The Checklist for Planners, by Jeanette Sledge, should be particularly useful for those without previous experience in planning a library. One wishes that R. R. Shaw had used more space describing flow process charting, a highly useful technique