

## CHAPTER THREE

### PRIVATE LIBRARIES AND READING TASTES

Having dealt with general and historiographical works, most bibliographers of American library history divide their material into types of libraries and topics that correspond generally to the chronological way in which they have come to occupy places of scholarly significance. Although these divisions vary somewhat, they usually begin with works that deal with personal libraries and with the reading tastes that influenced their creation. Historians and literary scholars have tended to link these two topics and have focused much of their study on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Perhaps this is because, before the widespread establishment of social and academic libraries that were accessible to the general public, private libraries served as the principal source of reading matter for large segments of literate society. After the founding of a greater number of institutional libraries, the number of significant private collections tended to decline by comparison, and some collections were absorbed in one way or another into larger institutions. When private collections became themselves institutionalized, they frequently formed the basis of research libraries. These receive coverage in Chapter 9, "Special Libraries-Private Research Libraries."

The two sections of this chapter reflect the themes suggested above. The section on reading tastes is very selective and includes primarily those items directly related to reading and book collecting. Citations to the book trade and publishing have been omitted from this chapter. Readers should consult such standard works as G. Thomas Tanselle's still definitive *Guide to the Study of United States Imprints* (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), John Tebbel's comprehensive *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* (4 vols.; New York: R. R. Bowker, 1971-1980), and Paul A. Winckler's *History of Books and Printing: A Guide to Information Sources* (Detroit: Gale, 1979). In any case, the distinction between studies of private libraries and reading tastes is not clear. Thus, the sections that follow should be used together.

references to the subject, and the final volume omits this aspect of intellectual history altogether.

The colonial and early national periods are now well covered. Louis B. Wright's *Cultural Life of the American Colonies* (1957, **3.95**) surveys private libraries and reading tastes broadly. New England has attracted the attention of several scholars, among them Thomas G. Wright (*Literary Culture in Early New England, 1620-1730*, 1920, **3.18**) and Samuel Eliot Morison (*Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*, 1965, **3.118**). The South has received its full treatment in Richard Beale Davis's three-volume work, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, (1978, **3.389**) of which volume two is devoted to libraries. A type of research that has declined in popularity but that still holds promise is the study of private libraries in various cities and states. Many of these efforts have concentrated on the South and include the early work of E. V. Lamberton on colonial Pennsylvania (1918, **3.15**), William Houlette's study of plantation libraries in the Old South (1933, **3.24**), John McDermott's *Private Libraries in Creole St. Louis* (1938, **3.44**), George Smart's analysis of libraries in colonial Virginia (1938, **3.45**), Joseph T. Wheeler's work on private libraries in colonial Maryland (1940, **3.50**), and John Goudeau's research on Louisiana (1965, **3.117**). Walter Edgar has done continuing study of libraries in colonial South Carolina (1969, **3.131** ; 1971, **3.139** ; 1977, **3.387**). Some of this material overlaps that found in the following section, devoted to reading tastes.

A final major category of studies dealing with private libraries consists of those devoted to the collecting interests of individuals. These works range from books dealing with the development of major collections to catalogs of individual libraries and brief descriptive articles on such collections. Although Benjamin Franklin has received much attention by scholars such as Edwin Wolf (1962, **3.110**) and Margaret Korty (1967, **3.125**), others have also undergone study, as exemplified by Walter Harding's *Emerson's Library* (1967, **3.122**), Daniel Meador's *Mr. Justice Black and His Books* (1974, **3.155**), Marie Korey's *The Books of Isaac Norris, 1701-1706, at Dickinson College* (1976, **3.162**), and Mildred Abraham's study of the library of Lady Jean Skipwith of Mecklenburg County, Virginia (1983, **3.178**). A more recent thesis in this category is Clyde Stanley's work on William Byrd II of Westover (1984, **3.181**).

American presidents seem to have attracted special attention from library historians. Among the more significant works of the genre are William Peden's dissertation, "Thomas Jefferson: Book Collector" (1942, **3.56**); Gordon W. Jones's *The Library of James Monroe, (1758-1830)* (1967, **3.124**); and *Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson* by Millicent Sowerby (1952-1959, 1983, **3.80**).

Since private libraries frequently have become the foundation or nucleus of large public or research libraries, the histories of these institutions often contain useful historical information. Examples of these include the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, the Jefferson books at the University of Virginia and the Library of Congress,

and the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. Donald C. Dickinson's

Defoe (*1935, 3.219*), Leon Howard on Milton (*1935, 3.220*), Esther C. Dunn on Shakespeare (*1939, 3.243*), Paul M. Spurlin on Montesquieu (*1940, 3.250*), Mary Barr on Voltaire (*1941, 3.252*), Spurlin, again, on Rousseau (*1948, 3.277*), Agnes M. Sibley on Pope (*1949, 3.282*), George F. Sensabough on Milton (*1964, 3.333*), Frederic M. Litto on Addison (*1966, 3.339*), Martin Roth on Sterne (*1970, 3.353*), and John M. Werner on Hume (*1972, 3.363*).

A final word is in order before closing this essay. For about a decade a group of

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- 3.13 Morrison, H. A. "Alaskana: Description of the Library of Judge Wickersham, Delegate in Congress from Alaska." *SL* 4 (1913): 183-84.
- 3.14 Tuttle, J. H. "The Library of Dr. William Ames." *PCSM* 14 (1913): 63-66.
- 3.15 Lamberton, E. V. "Colonial Libraries of Pennsylvania." *PMHB* 42 (1918): 193-234.
- 3.16 Potter, A. C. "Catalogue of John Harvard's Library." *PCSM* 21 (1919): 190-230.

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