
THE ALEXANDRIA CHRONICLE



Winter 2001/2002 Vol. IX, No 4.

Literary Taste in 19th Century

Alexandria, Virginia

by Robert C. Reed

The decade of the 1850s was a prosperous period for the Alexandria Library Company¹ as well as for the city at large. During the 1850s Alexandria entered a decade of extended growth that continued until the outbreak of the Civil War.

In 1850 the city's population was 8,795. By 1860, it had grown to 12,652. The decade of the 1850s was the greatest construction period in Alexandria's early history. The Alexandria Gazette reported that 700 houses had been built in the city during the first three years of the decade.

In 1850, 1,359 dwelling houses stood in the city. In 1853 there were 2,060, or about fifty percent growth.²

Accompanying the building boom was a growth in city services, technology, and transportation. In 1852 a waterworks piped running water to Alexandria households. In the same year a gas company began supplying illumination throughout the city, all the better for reading books after dark. Three newly chartered railroad companies linked antebellum Alexandria with Leesburg, Culpeper, and Strasburg, bringing increased

commerce and industry. Alexandria was also linked via its own spur to the C & O Canal, which in 1850 had reached Cumberland, Maryland.³ Times were good.

During the fifties the Alexandria Library Company increased both the size of its membership and its collection. In 1857 the Company's collection totaled 4,559 volumes, a large inventory for a city of its size. Richmond, Virginia, with a population of 37,910 in 1860 (roughly three times the size of Alexandria) had a library collection in 1855 of 5,080 volumes. Though these figures are not precisely comparable, they show the Alexandria Company's collection to be substantial for a private library in a city of its population.⁴

Library Company records show that many books were added to the collection during the 1850s. However, because purchases were sometimes listed by number of new books (138 new books in 1857) and other times by dollars spent (\$400 in 1854), the total volumes added during the decade is uncertain. Norval Foard, the Company's librarian in 1856, estimated that the company added from 125 to 150 books per year in the 1850s. In 1856 about 3,000 were checked out to members.

Membership and revenue were up as well in the 1850s. In 1840, there were 90 members. In 1852, after eight years of inactivity, the Library Company was reorganized and several new members added. In 1856 the Company had 100 members.

What then about the Company's book collection? Based on the published inventory of 1856 and the records of book purchases and donations between 1856 and 1860, one can see that the collection, then housed in the south room of the Lyceum Building [201 S. Washington Street], was well diversified.

A catalogue of the collection was published in 1856 for the use of members of the Company. A single original copy remains, stored in the archives at the Special Collections Division at the Barrett Library [717 Queen Street]. The 61 page pamphlet (5 1/2 x 8 3/4 inches) has a water-stained, crumbling beige paper cover. Inside the document is legible and well-printed by George S. Gideon of Washington City. It is prefaced by an introduction, a brief history of the Company, and the 1799 Act of Incorporation.

The catalog is the work, one assumes, of librarian Foard and a committee. All entries are made by alpha--sometimes by author, sometimes by title, often by both title and author, and rarely by subject.

Unlike the Company's earlier catalogs of 1801 and 1815, there is no attempt in 1856 to classify the collection by genre, that is except for a six-page appendix of travel books. One assumes that travel reading was so numerous in the collection and so popular among members that the committee chose to list such books

separately, grouped by alpha by country or region. Travel books are also listed in the main catalog by author.

Later catalogs printed in 1892, 1906, and 1912 were arranged by genre and therefore easier to use. The 1892 and 1906 catalogs displayed advertisements of Alexandria merchants and services.

periodicals and newspapers, self-improvement, theology-devotion-philosophy, history, government and politics, sciences, travel, biography-autobiography, and memoirs.

The Alexandria Library Company collection reflects the prevailing taste in reading of the times throughout America. Of the collection, one could not judge it scholarly, nor was it intended to be. It represents the taste



In the mid-1850s, the Alexandria Library was situated on the first floor south room of the Lyceum, 201 S. Washington Street.--Ballou's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion, 1858

The collection of the 1850s was catholic in its subject matter. The major classifications were the arts, fiction, poetry, the reference collection,

and interests of a diverse dues-paying membership, male and female, some well educated, others not. Although the book selections for the collection

committee appointed by the Company's officers, any member could request that a specific title be purchased.

The ARTS

The arts, particularly literary arts, were well represented in the 1850s. The bulk of the titles represented are Latin and Greek classics in translation: Aeschylus, Belisarius, Demosthenes, Herodotus, Horace, Homer, and reads on and on to Xenophon. There were also several volumes of classical mythology. The collection illustrates the high value the Company placed on classical writing.

Moreover, the inventory contained most of the standard works of English literature in prose, poetry, and drama from the 14th through the 18th centuries: Chaucer, Spencer, Shakespeare, Bacon, Milton, Swift, Pope, Donne, Ben Johnson, Goldsmith, and others.

In addition to the classics, the collection included a number of works of art criticism such as The Seven Lamps of Architecture published by John Ruskin in 1849. Ruskin (1819-1900) was an influential English critic and an enthusiast of the Gothic style. Also listed were Sir Joshua Reynolds' Discourses of Art; Edward Gibbon's Essay on the Study of Literature, James Beattie's Essays on Poetry and Music, and James Russell Lowell's Literary Criticism. The inventory also included many periodicals devoted to the arts. Nonetheless, the collection was light in the areas of painting, sculpture, and music.

FICTION

Reading novels was enormously popular in America in the antebellum years. In fact, the novel was the dominate literary form of the era. Most of the popular fiction on the market in the 1850s were the romantic novels, often placed in a historical setting.⁶

British literature dominated American literary taste in the first third of the 19th century.⁶ But by the mid-1850s many masterpieces of American literature had been published by such giants as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edgar Allen Poe, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne.⁷

By 1856 the Company's holdings of novels had grown considerably. The inventory of the popular novelists alone (Scott, Dickens, Bulwar-Lytton, and Thackery) totalled more than the Company's entire fiction collection in 1801.

By sheer number English titles dominated the fiction collection. There were 40 copies of the madly popular Sir Walter Scott in the Library Collection. No other novelist but Dickens had enjoyed such popularity in America.⁸ Particularly popular were his historic novels: Waverley, Guy Mannering, Rob Roy, Kenilworth and Ivanhoe, which sold 100,000 copies in the United States between 1820 and 1829.

All America loved Scott, but the South was especially enthusiastic for

him. From Virginia to Texas 35 towns were named Waverly.⁹ When Scott died in 1832, the Richmond Enquirer published the sad news in an issue heavily bordered in black, a custom usually reserved for the death of a U.S. President.¹⁰

Another popular novelist of the time was Scott's protege George Payne Rainsford James. James' chivalric romances sold well in America. The Library Company owned 34 of his novels: Agincourt, Arabella Stuart, Marston Hall, Old Dominion, Richelieu, and Darnley, to name but a few. So popular was James in America that he moved to the United States for a while, hoping to collect his royalties as a resident.¹¹

The best selling English novelist Maria Edgeworth was well represented in the collection by such historic romances as Castle Rackrent, Harrington, Leonors, Modern Griselda, and Tales of the Fashionable Life.

Judging by his seventeen titles (several with multiple copies) in the collection, novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton was popular reading in Alexandria. His most popular historical romance was The Last Days of Pompeii. (1834)

Charles Dickens was hugely popular in the 1840s and 1850s. The Library Company owned twenty-two volumes of Dickens: Bleak House, David Copperfield, Nicholas Nickleby, Oliver Twist, Pickwick Papers, A Tale of Two Cities, to list a few. Dicken's popular American Notes, about his

1842 tour of America was not in the collection.

Dickens' chief rival was William Makepeace Thackeray, who became popular in the United States after publication of Vanity Fair in 1841. The Company owned most of Thackeray's novels. His Virginians was published in 1859, too late to be included in the Company's antebellum collection.

Other popular mid-century English writers listed in the catalog were Charlotte Bronte, whose novel Shirley was published in 1849 under her pseudonym Currer Bell; Thomas de Quincey's Confessions of An English Opium Eater (a best seller in America in 1844); and Benjamin Disraeli's Vivian Gray. Disraeli became Prime Minister of England in 1869. Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, though a best seller in America, was not in the collection.

Library Company members were also well supplied with the work of the popular English novelists of the 18th and early 19th centuries: Samuel Richardson's Pamela or Virtue Rewarded; Amelia Opie's Adeline Mowbray; Jane Porter's Scottish Chiefs (forerunner of Scott's Highland novels); Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe; Lawrence Sterne's satiric Tristram Shandy; Henry Fielding's Tom Jones; Ann Radcliffe's Gothic thriller Mysteries of Udolpho; Burton's racy but delicious Arabian Nights Entertainment, and Frederick Marryat's Mr. Midshipman Easy.

By the 1850s American literature flourished. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the country's most influential spokesman for a native American literature, independent of European ways, was not represented in the Library Company's collection. But most of the leading writers of the time were.

Washington Irving, the first American to achieve international status as a writer, became famous in his own time. The Company owned 43 volumes of Irving. When he read Irving's History of New York, Sir Walter Scott said it made his sides hurt with laughter.¹²

James Fenimore Cooper had 37 titles in the collection. Company records show that two volumes of Cooper had to be rebound in 1855 because of heavy use. Cooper's adventurous novels about the American frontiersman Natty Bumppo (also called Leatherstocking) were extremely popular: The Last of the Mohicans, The Deerslayer, The Pathfinder, Pioneers, and The Prairie.

The Company owned four volumes of Virginia's poet and short story writer Edgar Allen Poe. Poe died in 1849. Sadly he did not sell well until after his death. The Company's catalog listed the complete works of Poe, which seems to have given him elevated status at the time. "Complete works" is a phrase usually not assigned to mediocre writers.

Other American novelists represented in the collection were Nathaniel Hawthorne, Richard Henry

Dana, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Herman Melville were in print in the mid-fifties but were not represented in the Alexandria collection. These writers were not popular with antebellum readers.¹³

Melville's novel about whaling, Moby Dick, was not destined for a wide readership when it first appeared. Only 60 copies of the book survived the Harper warehouse fire of 1853, though apparently enough copies to satisfy public demand for ten years since the book was not reprinted until 1863.¹⁴

The Company owned little of what we would now call juvenilia.

POETRY

Mid-nineteenth century readers liked their verse sentimental, homey, religious, or patriotic. The Company's antebellum poetry collection contained many of the popular American and English poets of the time, such as William Cullen Bryant, James Russell Lowell, Edgar Allen Poe, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Americans loved Longfellow. His "Paul Revere's Ride," "Evangeline," "The Village Blacksmith," "The Courtship of Miles Standish" were popular well into the next century. The Library Company also owned Longfellow's prose work, Hyperion. His "Song of Hiawatha," published in 1855, was probably the most popular of Longfellow's narrative poems, selling

so well that booksellers could not keep it in stock. Within five months 30,000 copies were sold, a remarkable number considering that poetry in America has never sold as well as prose.¹⁵

Also in 1855 Walt Whitman published his collection "Leaves of Grass." But it sold poorly. Whitman's brilliant but controversial work was not in the collection, nor were the poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

English Poet Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson was popular in the 1850s. The Company owned copies of his "Maud" and "In Memorium." Tennyson remarked more than once that he had more admirers and readers in America than in England.¹⁶

Lydia Huntley Sigourney, a popular mid-century poet who liked to write about angels and death was not in the Alexandria collection, nor were Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The Company did own volumes of now obscure 19th century poets such as Miss Bowdler, Jane Cawthorne, Samuel Garth, and William Broome. Nineteenth Century English poets in the collection were Robert Southey, William Wordsworth, and Charles Lamb.

Bell's 109 volumes of Poets of Great Britain contained the major works of the standard English names from Chaucer onward.

MAGAZINES & NEWSPAPERS

The Company's holdings of bound volumes of early American and

English periodicals was large in the 1850s. However, because no dates are indicated in the catalog, one has no clear understanding whether the Company subscribed to a magazine or whether the volumes were acquired by donation or purchased at a later date.

For example, Harper's New Monthly Magazine, established in New York in 1850, does not appear in the 1856 catalog; however seventy or more volumes of Harper's were shelved in Lloyd House with the old book collection. One must assume they were donated to the Company at some later date.¹⁷

The library owned bound volumes of some now rare early periodicals: The Monthly American and American Review, 21 volumes from 1790 to 1800 and the New-York Magazine, 4 volumes from 1794 to 1797. New-York Magazine was an upscale and rather expensive publication. Both President George Washington and Vice President John Adams were subscribers. The cost for a year's subscription was \$2.25 at a time when 50 cents a day was the usual wage for a working man.¹⁸ Other English and American periodicals in the collection were The Athenaeum, 21 vols, 1825-1831; American Annual Register, 5 vols, 1825-1831; The American Museum, 13 vols, 1787-1798; The American Review, 22 vols.; Analeptic Magazine, 16 vols, 1813-1820; Asiatic Annual Review, 7 vols; Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 11 vols, 1819-1840; Columbian Magazine, 1787; Edinburgh Review, 49 vols, 1802-1856; Emporium of Arts

and Science, 4 vols; Family Magazine; Franklin Institute, 12 vols; Knickerbocker Magazine, 4 vols, 1843-1855; Literary Panorama, 6 vols, 1806-1814; Literary Museum, 20 vols; Mechanics Magazine; Metropolitan Magazine, 21 vols; Monthly Review and Literary Journal, 21 vols; New Monthly Magazine, 6 vols, 1843-1849; Niles Weekly Register; Quarterly Review, 47 vols, 1809-1834; The Spectator, 8 vols; The Tattler, 4 vols; Theological Magazine, 21 vol, 1795-1799; Weekly Miscellany, 12 vols, 1811-1820; Westminster Review, 9 vols, 1824-1827; and The Southern Literary Messenger, 4 vols, 1836-1843.

Edgar Allen Poe was editor of the Messenger in the 1830s. Although subscribers to the magazine rose dramatically during his tenure as editor, he was fired in 1837 for his tendency to "sip the juice."¹⁸

Abbreviated listings of magazines in the 1856 catalog make study of the company's antebellum periodicals difficult. Some titles are listed under the heading magazines. But for purposes of brevity, the catalog does not list the complete title of the periodical, rather only a brief name. Monthly Magazine and American Review is listed as Monthly under the general heading magazine.

Under the general heading magazine, for instance, the catalog lists Ladies'. Mott's History of American Magazines in print before 1859 with Ladies' as the first word in the title: Ladies' Companion; Ladies' Garland; Ladies' Illustrated; Ladies' Port Folio;

Ladies Magazine (Boston); Ladies' Magazine (Philadelphia); Ladies' Magazine and Musical Repository; Ladies' Museum; Ladies' Pearl; and Ladies' Wreath.²⁰

Mott lists 884 magazines that were established in America between 1794 and 1859. For any researcher unfamiliar with the titles, the Company catalog is ambiguous and unreliable because the inventory makes no distinction (for the most part) between books, magazines, or newspaper titles. Many entries are listed without author.

Under M, for example, is listed Mirror, 2 volumes. Is one to assume that this entry is a book without author or a magazine. Mott lists no Mirror, but does list The New-York Mirror and the Ladies' Literary Gazette, 1823-1857. Or could it be Mirror and Farmer's Magazine, The Mirror of Fashion Magazine, or The Columbia Mirror newspaper, published in Alexandria between 1792 and 1800?

According to the inventory of 1856 the Company did not subscribe to the more popular illustrated magazines of the 1850s such as Harper's Monthly, Leslie's Weekly, Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion, or the Atlantic Monthly. The absence of the Atlantic Monthly is no surprise as the magazine was known to attack all things Southern and screamed editorially for abolition.²¹

The Company's list of newspapers was slimmer than their periodicals. They did have bound volumes of several Alexandria papers:

The Alexandrian, 1820; The Alexandria Herald, 12 vols, 1811-1820; the Times and Alexandria Advertiser; and The Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser for 1784, the first year of its publication. The Company also owned three volumes of the National Intelligencer of Washington, D.C., which published three times a week from 1800 to 1869. The Intelligencer was a leading political newspaper, carrying accurate and full reports of Congressional proceedings that were picked up and used by other papers throughout the country.²²

Oddly, the Company did not subscribe to the Alexandria Gazette which has been in business off and on from 1789. In 1857, the Library Company asked for and received permission from the County Court to house (on a borrowed basis) 40 volumes of the Gazette, with the understanding that the newspaper would be available for anyone, Library company member or not, without fee.

REFERENCE

The Library Company's reference collection was extensive in the 1850s. The inventory lists American almanacs, maps, atlases, and geographies. There was even a copy of Debrett's Peerage of Great Britain. Reference shelves contained dictionaries of many sorts; Webster's American Language Dictionary, Johnson's English Dictionary, foreign language dictionaries, along with biographical dictionaries, herbal, medical, and a two-volume dictionary of arts and sciences, one for gardeners, and a rare early

Dictionary of Trade and Commerce published in 1756.

There were three sets of encyclopedias: Domestic Encyclopedia, Edinburgh Encyclopedia, and Ree's Encyclopedia.

The collection also contained several volumes of government records: The Catalogue of the Congressional Library, Senate Records, the U.S. Census Records of 1800, 1840, and 1850; U.S. Commerce and Navigation Reports, twenty-one volumes of Diplomatic Correspondence, Patent Office Reports, and law books of most American states. There seem to be few Alexandria reference records, but the Company did have the Proceedings of the Alexandria Academy.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

The collection contained a number of didactic works on the subject of rearing young people and self improvement: John Bennet's Letters on Female Education; Mrs. Murray's Mentoria, The Young Ladies' Instruction; Familiar Conversations on Moral and Entertaining Subjects, Hannah Moore's Essays, which instructed youth of both sexes about how to be good, thrifty, elegant, and happy.

Lord Chesterfield's 3 volume Letters to His Son gave fathers advice about how to make a son a "perfect gentleman."

Other titles on the topic of self improvement were On the Conduct of

Life, Antidote to the Miseries of Human Life, Guide to Happiness, Self-Control; Tomorrow Or The Dangers of Delay, Improvement of the Mind, and Duties of the Female Sex.

THEOLOGY & PHILOSOPHY

Religion does not dominate the 1856 inventory. There are, however, sermons aplenty (twenty-five volumes of them), church histories, Bibles, and Bible Commentaries. But there are books about atheism and demonology as well.

Despite the Quaker influence in Alexandria and in the Library Company, Quaker literature is scant. Alexandria Quaker writer Samuel Janney's books are listed: Conversation on Religious Subjects and his Life of William Penn. Also listed is Clarkson's Portrait of Quakers. But the collection did not contain the most popular work of Quaker literature: the Journal of New Jersey Quaker John Woolman. Nor did it contain Bunyan's great allegorical work Pilgrim's Progress.

Few works of the New England Puritan writers appeared in the collection: Increase and Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, Roger Williams, or Michael Wigglesworth, whose long poem "Day of Doom" had been a big seller.

Nor was the philosophy collection large. It contained fewer titles than the religion section. Titles included Robert Owen's Formation of Human Character (Owen established

the New Harmony Colony in Indiana); John Locke's On Human Understanding; and Paley's Moral and Political Philosophy.

HISTORY

History: ancient, modern, and local composed an important segment of the Company's collection. It included such standard work as Rollins' Ancient History; Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Macauley's History of England, Bancroft's History of the United States, and Prescott's Conquest of Mexico and Peru.

The collection also contained many histories of individual countries in Europe and Asia. There were ten works on the American Revolution and twelve volumes of the Queens of England. The Company did not own the work of Thomas Carlyle, the influential Victorian historian and biographer, whose History of the French Revolution was published in 1837. Carlyle was a hero to Emerson, who visited him twice in England. The Company did own Carlyle's essays.

As for local history, the Company owned Beverley's History of Virginia, Bozman's History of Maryland, Mobs and Riots of Maryland, and Lafayette in America. The Company also owned a rare first edition (1624) of John Smith's The General History of Virginia.

GOVERNMENT, POLITICS & SLAVERY

Although the Library Company contained many books by and about English and American statesmen and politicians as well as many reference works and records pertaining to Federal and state government, the work on political theory is slim in proportion to the other genres in the collection.

Major works were John Quincy Adams' Defense of the Constitution of the United States; Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia; Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America, and Michel G.J. de Crevecoeur's widely read Letters from an American Farmer. Of Crevecoeur's essays, George Washington said, "too flattering to be true."²³ It was Crevecoeur who coined the metaphor of America as a melting pot.

With the debate over slavery raging among Virginians in the 1850s, one is not surprised to see books about slavery issues in the collection. Alexandria was doubtless divided in its sympathies. It was a Southern city actively involved in the slave trade. But it also possessed a vocal and influential Quaker sub-culture, who actively opposed slavery, as did other religious groups in the city.

The Company owned the most famous of the anti-slavery tracts, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Uncle Tom's Cabin. The book was published in 1852, selling 1.2 million copies by the summer of 1853. And it sold equally well in England and on the

Continent. The book stirred deep feeling throughout America. Few publishing successes have equaled Uncle Tom's Cabin.²⁴

Also in the collection was the Reverend Mr. Adams' South-Side View of Slavery, which represented a different point of view from Stowe's. Other books on the subject were Bledsoe's Liberty and Slavery; Clarkson's History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade and W.A. Smith's Philosophy and Practices of Slavery.

SCIENCE

Scientific works composed an important segment of the collection. Moreover, the inventory illustrates the Library Company's coverage in a number of the sciences: medicine, psychology, the natural sciences (including agriculture, geology, and botany), the physical sciences, economics, and the social sciences.

Medical titles included three books by John Bell: Anatomy, Surgery, and on Cholera. Others were Ralph's Guide to Domestic Medicine; Matthew's On Yellow Fever; Ryan's On Consumption; Lind's On Scurvy; and Duncan's Medical Cases. Moreover, there were six volumes of Medical Essays, six volumes of Medical Observations, three volumes of James Medical Dictionary, and twelve volumes of Benjamin Silliman's Journal of Science.

But the Company's medical books were not limited to conditions and diseases of the body. At least four

works probed the emotions, what we now call psychology. They are Thomas Arnold's On Insanity; Benjamin Rush's Diseases of the Mind; Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, and Mme DeStael's Reflections of Suicide.

The titles about the natural sciences included Alexander von Humbolt's Cosmos; Agassize's Natural History; Russell's Use of Sea Water; Williamson's On the Climate in America; St. Pierre's Studies of Nature, and Erasmus Darwin's Botanic Garden. Erasmus Darwin was the grandfather of Charles Darwin, whose book about human evolution, Origin of the Species, rocked Europe and America. But the book was published too late to appear in the company's antebellum collection.

Books dealing with agriculture were Sinclair's Code of Agriculture; Curwin's Hints on Agriculture; Cuvier's Theory of the Earth; Elkinson's On Draining; and Trees and Fruits (no author given).

On the subject of the physical sciences, the Company owned several books on chemistry and geology including Joseph Priestley's Lectures on the Physical Sciences.

The books on economics and the social sciences included the works of the Nineteenth century giants: T.R. Malthus' Essay on Population; John Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract, and Ricardo's Political Economy.

SCOTTISH TOPICS

It is likely that Alexandria was not as ardently devoted to things Scottish as it seems to be today. But one cannot fail to notice the number of Scotland-related books in the 1856 inventory. In fiction there was Jane Porter's best-selling novels Bannockburn and The Scottish Chiefs, the enormously popular historical novels of Sir Walter Scott, and four volumes of the poems and letters of Robert Burns.

In non-fiction there was Kerr's Reign of Robert Bruce; A Biography of Mary Queen of Scots; five volumes of Eminent Scotsmen; A Tour of the Highlands of Scotland; Mrs. Grant's Superstitions of the Highlands, and four volumes of The History of Scotland.

TRAVEL

The Library Company members appear to have been great readers of travel literature. There seems to be no land on earth that members could not travel to in their armchairs. The catalog appendix listed 198 travel books in the collection in 1856.

Titles include Adamon's Voyage to Senegal; Shaler's Sketches of Algiers; Barrows Travels to China; and Perry's Expedition to Japan. Abyssinia, Africa, Albania, Aleppo, North and South America, Arabia, Arctic, Asia, and Atlantic Ocean were the subjects listed in the appendix under "A" alone. Others range from Borneo to Zanzibar.

The Company owned a number of titles about travel in America. Most famous of the early 19th century travel books about America was Mrs. Frances Trollope's Domestic Manners of America, published in 1832 and part of the Library Company collection. Her unflattering but probably accurate picture of America outraged many Americans, but they read it as they had read no book of travel before. The more the book was abused in the American press, the more rapidly it sold. Mrs. Trollope spent the winter of 1830-1831 in Alexandria working on her book and recuperating from a fever. She boarded with a widow and her four daughters and was treated by a physician of "more than local reputation"²⁵ She wrote that after living in Alexandria for a few weeks her strength was restored.

Trollope said nothing unflattering about Alexandria. In fact, she seemed to enjoy her stay here. She liked walking along the Potomac shore and watching watercraft on the river.²⁶ She also writes that it was in Alexandria that she saw the best picture by an American artist she had ever seen, painted by Alexandrian John Gadsby Chapman.²⁷

But it was also during her eight month sojourn in Alexandria that she witnessed the cruelty and miseries of slavery.²⁸ Trollope left Alexandria in April 1831 to return to England after her four-year stay in America.

An additional travel book in the collection written by an English was Capt. Basil Hall's Travels in North

America (published in 1830), which was thought wickedly cruel of American manners. Hall was a friend of Mrs. Trollope and assisted her in publishing her own book when she returned, penniless, to England in August 1831.²⁹

BIOGRAPHY-MEMOIR

Judging from the 1856 catalog the Library Company members liked reading biography, autobiography and personal memoirs since there were a great many titles in the genre. Many of the books were about American patriots and heroes: John Paul Jones, Daniel Boone, Tom Paine, John Marshall, Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, Stephen Decatur, and of course George Washington. European military heroes in the biography section were Baron von Steuben, Count Bernadotte, Lafayette, Horatio Nelson, Peter the Great, and The Duke of Wellington. Biographies of religious figures were John Calvin, Cotton Mather, John Wesley, and John Knox.

Almost all of the biographies were about men. However, the Company owned seven volumes of Female Biography by Mary Hays and twelve volumes of the Queens of England.

Another type of biography popular during the first part of the 19th century was the personal account of Indian captivity. These captivity narratives were almost always full of high adventure, brutality, torture, and abduction. These narratives were lively reading but also often contained moral

messages about the working of divine providence. The Company owned Charles Johnson's Narrative of Capture by Ohio Indians, but not the more widely read A Narrative on the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, who was held for three months in 1676 by brutish Indians.

Memoirs, as an adjunct to the Company's collection of biography, were popular reading: Thomas Benton's Thirty Years in the U.S. Senate; Lord Chesterfield's Memoirs; The Memoirs of Hernando Cortez, and the Memoirs of Thomas Jefferson.

From looking over the titles in the memoirs collection, one might deduce that many of the readers of memoirs were women. But such an argument lies on a slippery slope. Memoirs were frequently written by women: Countess of Blessington, Countess de la Motte, Lady Montague, Empress Josephine, Hannah More, Queen Elizabeth, Baroness von Menutoli, Marie Antoinette, and Iwanowa, the maid of Mexico, to list a few.

CONCLUSION

What remains of the Alexandria Library Company's antebellum book collection is shelved at the Special Collections Division of the Barrett Library [717 Queen Street]. In 1976 Company members Sara Ann Lindsey and Katherine Beede began an inventory of the old collection. What they found was that the old leather bound books were in poor condition. Several hundred titles were missing:

lost, pilfered, damaged beyond repair, or sold.

In 1877, the president of the Company was authorized to sell books that would be of value to antiquarians in order to raise money for the library. moreover, the collection was physically moved a dozen times during its history. During the Civil War the books were dispersed among members' houses for safekeeping.

Despite the elegiac tone of Beede's report, hundreds of books from the library's antebellum collection remain intact today, albeit a bit worse for wear. It is a literary treasure, waiting for bibliophiles and scholars of the future to study. The Library Company must begin to make long range plans for the future of the collection.

Endnotes:

1. The Alexandria Library Company is the oldest private library company in Virginia. It was first established in 1794 and was incorporated in 1799. The present Alexandria City Library is an offshoot of this early institution.
2. Ethelyn Cox, Historic Alexandria, Alexandria, Virginia Street by Street (Alexandria, Virginia: Alexandria Foundation, 1976), xx
3. Fraley, 3
4. Yvonne Carignan, A History of the Alexandria Library

5. Boyer, 403
6. Ibid., 409
7. Davidson
8. Mott Golden Multitude, 70
9. Hart, 76
10. Ibid., 77
11. Hart, 78
12. Norton, 894
13. Boyer, 409
14. Hart, 922
15. Hart, 129
16. Mott Golden Multitude, 106
17. The old Alexandria Library Company collection, formerly housed at Lloyd House, has been removed to the Edith Sprouse Room at the Barrett Library, 717 Queen Street.
18. Davidson, 114
19. Norton, 1432
20. Mott History Vol. II, 353
21. Beede
22. Encyclopedia of American Journalism, 56
23. Norton, 657

24. Boyer, 560
25. Trollope, lix
26. Trollope, 294
27. Trollope, 326
28. Trollope, 247
29. Trollope, lix

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In Memorandum

JAMES BOYD WILLIAMS, JR.

January 19, 1902 - May 29, 1999

January 19, 2002, was the 100th anniversary of the birth of James Boyd Williams, Jr. Mr. Williams (or Jimmy, as he was known to all) was a life-long resident of Alexandria. Except for the time he served in the Navy, Jimmy never lived outside the city limits of Alexandria.

Jimmy was always ready to share stories of places and people he knew in his beloved city. His knowledge of the city and the effort he expended in passing on that legacy were an inspiration to all of us at the Historical Society.



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