

# The Past Decade

By ABBOTT LOWELL CUMMINGS, Director

THERE seems no more fitting way to honor our retiring Director than review events of the past ten years. The story of the past decade for our Society is the story of unprecedented growth—slow and steady in some areas, explosive in others—but growth nevertheless in the most challenging and awesome sense of the word. As we meet today to celebrate this sixtieth anniversary it may truly be said that in many individual respects the gains of the past ten years have doubled or even quadrupled the performances reported in those same areas within the entire first fifty years of the Society's existence. We have heard often and inelegantly that the army travels on its belly, and so we should begin, perhaps, with the parallel thought that charitable institutions must cover their ground on endowment income, though hopefully not in the same undignified posture. While it may seem crass to leap at once in our retrospective reverie into the subject of money, it should be remembered, of course, that much of what we are about to relate in the name of progress would not have been possible without the very satisfying increment to those general, unrestricted capital funds which over and beyond the capital funds held by the Society for individual restricted purposes, have permitted us to add to our staff, provide better salaries and reasonable fringe benefits, and to inaugurate new programs in line with the many and startling developments in the field of historic preservation. While the total figure of the Endowment for General Purposes is far from adequate to our needs even yet, we can reflect with considerable sat-

isfaction, nevertheless, that the amount has virtually doubled within the past decade.

Equally important, though far less substantial gains have been made in both the Museum and Library funds. In his annual report for the year 1960 the then Librarian lamented that that department of the Society's operation with its important collections of books, photographs, photographic negatives and other ephemera, had never been able to count on any regular income whatsoever, relying instead upon the unpredictable financial support of current gifts. At the close of that annual meeting in 1960 a generous friend of the Society came forward and wrote a check upon the spot in the amount of \$3,000 for the purpose of beginning an endowment fund for the Library. In reporting this most welcome gift in his annual report of the following year, the Librarian expressed a hope that others would be encouraged to add to the Fund, thus permitting our Library in time to become self-supporting. This thought, I am happy to say, has appealed to a number of our members and friends, and the Library Fund, while again far from adequate to our needs, has nevertheless grown handsomely, and now a decade later stands at \$18,876. A Museum Endowment Fund was established by the Society at the same time in 1960, and here we can report with satisfaction (though the similarity in the amounts is entirely coincidental) that a number of generous friends have boosted this Fund also to the amount of \$18,773.

The income from these two Funds helps, of course, in the ongoing activities

and administration of two of our most important interests: for the Museum, the garnering in of the many and incredibly diversified smaller antiquities which, falling outside the category of house furnishings, are to be considered primarily as deserving of display upon the case shelf; and for the Library, the careful preservation of the past on paper, the record, in our opinion particularly in the form of a photograph, often proving to be almost as valuable as the object itself.

To record the growth of our Museum collections through gifts, bequests and through purchases during the past decade would fill a report in itself. Suffice it to say that the steady inflow of material has consistently kept our curatorial staff stretched out straight, and was climaxed this spring by the arrival of thirty-seven packing crates from Portland, Maine, from the executors of the estate of our much-esteemed member, Miss Margaret Jewell (whose earlier gifts to the Society have included that collection of children's mugs which has contributed in such an important way to the popular appeal of our New England Museum). To keep pace with this steady influx it is gratifying to report that not only have the exhibition areas in the Museum building attached to the Otis House been freshened and rearranged, but far more adequate study-storage areas have been constructed for our all-important collections of textiles and costumes, wallpaper, and children's toys.

Similarly, the Library has grown by leaps and bounds, and we have found it necessary during the years between 1960 and 1970 literally to double the space which houses the collections. Here, perhaps, it might be wise to mention in more specific terms certain gifts and purchases, particularly as they have helped to make

our Library unique, or to build up strength in certain categories which cannot be duplicated elsewhere. Thus, the decade of the 1960's brought to the Society's Library the original measured drawings of the John Hancock House in Boston, drafted by John H. Sturgis in 1863 and considered to be the first measured drawings of an historic house ever made in this Country. A major portion of the original sketches of the artist, Edwin Whitefield, have also been received for our Library. The significance of these appealing pencil and watercolor drawings lies in the fact that many of them were translated by Mr. Whitefield to lithographic stones and were published under the series title of *The Homes of our Forefathers*, in various New England states. They are considered the first formal effort of their kind to record in systematic fashion the architectural landmarks of New England, beginning to vanish even then in the 1870's and 1880's. But all other considerations in connection with the Society's Library pale before the spectacle of growth in the category of historic negatives. By 1960, owing largely to the indefatigable efforts of our founder, the Society already boasted one of the most impressive negative collections in the Country, and in terms purely of subject matter, probably the largest collection dealing specifically with historic buildings on a regional basis. The Baldwin Coolidge, Annie Haven Thwing, Emma Coleman, Stebbins Marine, George F. Noyes, Haliday and Mary H. Northend collections are all too well known to require further identification, and had helped, in the aggregate, to swell the number of negatives held by the Society by 1960 to approximately 30,000.

During the past decade we have had the rare good fortune to make further

highly significant additions to the collection, including some 3,000 negatives of rolling stock and stations of the Boston & Albany Railroad, now of blessed memory, a collection of several thousand negatives which document nearly every structure within those five towns submerged now beneath the waters of the Quabbin Reservoir, the surviving remnants of the justly famous Wallace Nutting Photographic Collection, and above all, some 6,000 negatives exposed during a long career devoted to architectural photography by the late Arthur C. Haskell, one of the most distinguished artists in his profession, and remembered today in particular for the superb photographs he contributed to the White Pine Monograph Series. Our negative holdings now number with these additions something more than 50,000, and can safely be considered the largest regional collection of the kind in the Country. In the breadth and quality of our holdings the collection is second to none in the Nation. Happily, too, it can be reported that by the spring of 1963 we had completed the construction of a new room specially designed for the housing under proper conditions of these negatives. One need hardly add that their chief practical value lies in furnishing fresh photographic prints to students, collectors, publishers and others, and by so doing the Society will not only gain increasing recognition, but the reasonable margin of profit derived from printing and processing the photographs will go far in the future to supplement the still limited Library income. Would it seem out of place to remark here that volunteer help in the all-important task of cataloguing these many negatives would be welcome indeed!

All of which leads to a most highly important category, and consideration of

the growth which has taken place in connection with the Society's many historic properties—the acquisition, preservation and interpretation of which has been from our very founding a principal, if not *the* principal focus of the Society's energies. In several of the existing properties the picture has been substantially improved through additions to capital funds, the segregated income from which helps to support the individual operations. Thus we report with pleasure for the decade of 1960 to 1970 significant additions to the endowments of the Emerson-Howard House in Ipswich, Mawdsley-Gardner-Watson-Pittman House in Newport (this through a generous bequest from our former president, Arthur B. Lisle), the Richard Jackson House in Portsmouth (through a welcome bequest from Miss Jewell), and our headquarters, the Harrison Gray Otis House, through two substantial bequests, one from Miss Jewell and the other from our former trustee, the late Albert W. Rice.

The Vale in Waltham, whose faltering steps had become ever shakier owing to the twin-horned dilemma of increasing administrative and maintenance costs and insufficient endowment, has during the past decade received a new lease on life through the untiring efforts of the Vale Committee, ably headed by Mrs. Ronald T. Lyman, Jr., who has succeeded in raising funds to offset in some measure, at least, the almost Augean character of expense gobbled up by this magnificent and important late eighteenth-century country estate. Among the more important gains are a complete restoration of the smaller original greenhouse of about 1800, and the putting into more effective shape for use of those greenhouses which house the historic grapes and camelias, to say nothing of the later greenhouse to the

north in which classes in plant care are now being conducted in conjunction with the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. Further, the whole complex is now subject to the full-time oversight of a greenhouse specialist.

The decade of the 1960's also saw the re-creation of Miss Sarah Orne Jewett's garden at the rear of her impressive eighteenth-century home in South Berwick—a vast improvement over the ravages of untamed Nature which had hitherto for many years gone unchecked here; and, most importantly, the long-pressing need for direct oversight of our rare and interesting Rocky Hill Meetinghouse of 1785 was solved in connection with a state highway project in the area, at which time the eighteenth-century parsonage, adjacent to our meetinghouse but long privately owned, was acquired by the Society and moved onto the meetinghouse lot to serve as attractive custodian's quarters—the age of the house making the project desirable in itself from the point of view of preservation.

Our newest acquisitions, however, must take the limelight. There have been eight highly significant and exciting additions to the number of properties owned and administered by the Society between 1960 and 1970. These range in period, scale and character. At the head of the list for sheer impressiveness stand those two finely proportioned, three-story mansions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century respectively, each generously furnished with the possessions of the last families to occupy them, namely, the Fisher-Bliss (or Captain's) House in Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard, the most welcome gift of Eleanor B. Radley, and the celebrated Codman House with fifteen acres of surrounding park-like land in Lincoln, Massachusetts, received

through bequest from the late Miss Dorothy Codman. More modest in scale is the early nineteenth-century Merwin House in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, received from the estate of Mrs. E. T. Merwin. Here the full complement of family furnishings of the middle and later nineteenth century helps to create unusual interest and round out a somewhat neglected period in time among the Society's houses. Four of the newer acquisitions represent that period for which New England has become perhaps most well known—the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and all reveal unusual features or characteristics not represented elsewhere among our houses. The Gilman Garrison House in Exeter, New Hampshire, which came to the Society under the will of our long-time member, William P. Dudley, is, as its name implies, and despite a later coat of clapboards and the presence of a handsome eighteenth-century wing, a seventeenth-century hewn log defensive dwelling of a variety now scarcely to be found in New England. The Pierce House in Dorchester, Massachusetts, built about 1650, is one of the earliest, if not *the* earliest house now extant in metropolitan Boston, and can boast of the continued occupancy by a single family through ten generations of Pierces until its acquisition by the Society in 1968, made possible by the generosity of a former trustee. The Captain Matthew Perkins House in Ipswich, Massachusetts, of about 1710, is distinguished for the wealth of its surviving architectural detail, including one of the best Jacobean staircases in New England, while the Gedney House in Salem, *c.* 1665, acquired by the Society in 1967, makes extraordinary virtue of the fact that its interior trim had unhappily been stripped away before the house came to

our notice. The resultant opportunity to see in totally unimpeded fashion the bare bones of a seventeenth-century structure, however, was too good to miss. This interesting house will thus be maintained in its present condition for the edification of architects and students of early construction. And even as we are gathered here this afternoon active negotiations are in progress for the acquisition of the eighth property on our list, the celebrated Henry C. Bowen House (Roseland Cottage) in Woodstock, Connecticut. The house itself is one of the best-preserved examples of the Gothic Revival in New England, and comes to us with its original lawns and formal gardens and Gothic outbuildings which include the earliest bowling alley in the Country. Five American presidents have been entertained here, and July 4, 1970, marks the one-hundredth anniversary of President Grant's visit, an event which *he* marked with a perfect ten-strike in the now unique alley. Acquisition of the Pink House property has been made possible largely through generous private subscription and special considerations to the Society by the family in whose hands the property has always remained.

Of new activities, inaugurated throughout the course of the past decade, time will permit touching upon only the highlights: the establishment of a Women's Council which has rendered invaluable service in our many social functions and is now, in the Society's sixtieth year, broadening the sphere of its concern to more momentous matters; the creation of an OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND advisory Board, under whose guidance our quarterly has now been expanded in size and quality; the special publication with hard covers in 1964 of the source reference book, *Rural House-*

*hold Inventories, 1675-1775*, and a second printing in 1969 of the Society's popular manual, *Bed Hangings*; the first and subsequent Fall series for members devoted to specialized lectures in depth on the subject of architecture and house furnishings; the detailed study undertaken by the Society under contract to the Boston Redevelopment Authority to determine the feasibility of sympathetic rehabilitation of the Faneuil Hall Markets for viable contemporary use; the inauguration in May of 1961 of the first of a series of bus tours sponsored by the Society to visit outlying properties, culminating in April 1970 in our first international tour to visit via transatlantic plane and bus the many and varied timber-framed buildings of late Medieval England which served as the prototypes of our New England houses; receipt of a grant of \$3,500 from the Permanent Charity Fund, Inc. to implement a study carried out jointly by the Society and Boston University to determine the feasibility of establishing a doctoral program in American Studies in the latter's graduate school. This carefully considered possibility, we are happy to report, will become a reality in the fall of the current year, and through special considerations the Society is privileged to advance one of the first fellowships to be associated with this vital program which will go a long way towards preparing the leaders of tomorrow in the field of historic preservation; and not the least of our achievements, though not yet complete, is the refurbishing of the Harrison Gray Otis House. Starting in bravely during the summer of 1969 with what seemed then an adequate Development Fund, and looking to the additional support of supplementary gifts, we were caught quite off guard by the financial strictures of the

current season. Much has been accomplished, nevertheless, including the installation of an early warning fire detection system throughout the entire headquarters plant, and there are noticeable improvements as you will see later this afternoon, in particular the newly restored Withdrawing Room on the second floor. Work has been halted, however, until the times improve, and it need scarcely be added that the necessary work can go forward only insofar as our members and friends respond in an effort to help us surmount the financial hurdles.

Finally, we come to that most important consideration of all, the growth of our Society in human resources. As the decade of the 1960's opened one could easily discover by consulting the cast of characters published on the inside cover of *OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND* that the entire full-time administrative staff of the Society consisted of six persons, including most importantly our much loved and indispensable Florence Addison, who with this meeting rounds out fifty years of unparalleled service and devotion to the Society. Now, as we embark upon the seventh decade of the Society's labors and a vastly more complicated world of historic preservation the director can look forward to drawing upon the skilled, full-time professional services of an Associate Director whose former training included service with our National Park Service; a Supervisor of Properties recruited from the Columbia University graduate program devoted to the techniques of historic preservation; a Curator of Collections, trained in the New York State Historical Association program for historical administrators at Cooperstown; a Librarian who comes to us from the cura-

torial staff of the Lyman Allen Museum in New London; a Library Assistant from the excellent student co-op program at Northeastern University; a part-time professional Registrar and Curatorial Assistant; a fully qualified Financial Secretary; a Membership Secretary; two administrative secretaries; a building superintendent and the services in the field of a skilled carpenter. The substantive boost to the routine administrative affairs which this highly qualified group has brought to bear within the past year gives every promise that the Society can move forward with confidence to take up new challenges as the decade unfolds.

Our staff is for the most part composed of younger persons, and we are all (hopefully) young in heart, and anxious to meet the challenges of the coming years. In the face of even those more alarming challenges which have been foreshadowed by the strife of the 1960's it is particularly heartening to me to realize that our ebullient staff remains basically undismayed. In the midst of the untamed frenzy in our streets there exists, we believe, a core of constructive energy waiting to be harnessed—energy constructive in its concern for the conservation of our open spaces and natural resources, in its concern for the quality of our environment and concern for the preservation of the best which we have inherited from the past. If ten years from today it can be reported that the Society has done nothing more than help to play a really significant role in the achievement of these all-important goals then I am sure we can all look back upon that decade of the 1970's with as much solid satisfaction as we view today the accomplishments of the decade just past.