

Henry Whittamore Library Dedication - December 2, 1973

Statement by Stanley M. McDonald, Jr., Library Director

It is said that Henry Whittamore was not much given to speech making, but that he had a droll way of interjecting questions or comments into a discussion which were usually humorous, always interesting, and often illuminating. I can't help wondering, in fact, what he might say on such an occasion; and, indeed, if he would not interrupt me quite freely.

He was born the seventh of twelve children in Hopkinton, Massachusetts July 23, 1843. He prepared for college at Hopkinton High School and taught there at the same time to earn his way. He joined the Dartmouth Class of 1866, and was graduated with his class in spite of four months service with the Fifth Massachusetts Infantry and a further interruption caused by an attack of typhoid fever. After graduation he entered the medical school at Bowdoin, but overwork due to his attempt to pay his way by teaching while pursuing his studies led to further illness and a warning from his doctors that his physical constitution could not endure the strains of a physician's life.

While recuperating from this illness, he visited a brother teaching music in Chicago and in 1874 returned to Massachusetts to become principal of the High School in Westboro. In 1875 he was given the combined position of principal and superintendent. In July of that year he married Clara Foss of Saco, Maine. In 1883, he resigned at Westboro to become Superintendent of Schools in Waltham. Throughout this period, Henry Whittamore's leadership in professional associations brought him the widespread respect and recognition that grew around his personal warmth and dedication even more abundantly when he came to Framingham Normal School in 1898. The school was his life for 19 years until his retirement in 1917. He continued, then to serve as President

of the Alumnae Association where his work in establishing Framingham Clubs exemplified his benign and fatherly influence.

The external facts of Henry Whittemore's life are accessible to us in the same sense in which the books in this library are accessible to those who wish to use them. Of the nearly 100,000 volumes in the stacks beneath this reading room, we may check out and even read and digest those that seem to suit our purposes. And yet, the task of encompassing even a small body of knowledge without losing contact with the ever-growing whole, increases in difficulty even as it becomes more essential. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched here to draw an analogy in our manner of attempting to recover and honor the significance of Henry Whittemore in 1973.

Although we and time dissipate some influences, others we choose to perpetuate--if only as potential sources of renewal. But values stored away, whether in volumes or unwritten memory have a way of being altered or overlaid by the accretions of time. Similarly, a man's significance does not cease when his immediate influence ends; but his significance and his identity do become more and more what we make of them. And especially do they exist in the manner in which we share and communicate them.

We might well ask ourselves today, how many unwritten volumes of feelings, thoughts, impressions, facts and opinions have been exchanged and communicated about Henry Whittemore since his death 42 years ago. His good influence persists in many ways, but perhaps most clearly in the tradition of concern and respect for the individual as the cornerstone of education. Indeed, if we are to rediscover the real personality and character which are intrinsic to the accomplishments of the man, we shall have to do so individually, reconstructing for ourselves an idea of a life's purpose which would fill volumes, but which was more fully lived, perhaps, for being an unwritten volume: like the library itself, which we cannot fully take in a lifetime, but which we are nevertheless able to dedicate in the knowledge that it is a living, growing, memorial to one man, and yet contains the memory of all.

Norman Cousins said, " A library....should be the delivery room for the birth of ideas....a place where history comes to life". Those whose foresight and planning made this building possible did bring history to life and demonstrated the truth of Henry Whittemore's last message, published in the Dial of 1931: "The highest success comes from hard work, always an honest purpose and a high character".

To fulfill the role of the library, it is the continuing work of the library staff to evaluate, improve and enlarge the library collections and services. While current acquisitions must be maintained over a broad spectrum of disciplines, the library must also focus on and respond to specific needs which require detailed evaluation of holdings and careful planning of acquisitions.

Naturally, this cannot be done in all areas simultaneously. For example, however, and above and beyond the budget for current acquisitions, the library this year is applying one thousand dollars of Federal Funds to each of five identified areas of critical need; Black and Ethnic Studies; Environmental and Ecological Concerns; Career Education; Minority and Disadvantaged Student Enrichment; and Reading Education. Materials will be purchased which have been determined to meet these needs. Doing this in advance of expressed, specific demands, as much of it must be done, requires judgement and bibliographic skill. The library's best hope of continuing to build upon its strength and to develop new ones as they are required is in a professional staff able to apply their skills and knowledge to the purposeful selection of materials in concert with the faculty to support undergraduate and graduate needs.

Finally, it should be the major goal of the library to improve its ability to provide the full range of services necessary to enable its growing collections to be effectively used by all in the free search for information, knowledge, and self-renewal.