

# MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES

## MEETINGS

The executive council, at a meeting on November 10, 1914, appointed Warren Upham, who has served the society faithfully as secretary since 1895, to the position of archeologist to succeed the late Professor N. H. Winchell. At the same meeting, Solon J. Buck, assistant professor of history in the University of Minnesota, was appointed to the position of superintendent of the society.

The annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society was held in the Capitol at St. Paul, January 18, 1915. The business session convened at 7:30 P.M. in the reading room of the society's library. The superintendent presented a report on the operations of the society during the year 1914. As the information in this report will be included in the *Eighteenth Biennial Report* of the society, soon to be issued, it is not necessary to recapitulate it here.

The society, by a unanimous vote, adopted the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That a committee of three be appointed by the president to revise and consolidate the by-laws of the society and of the executive council; and said by-laws, when adopted by said council, to forthwith become effective and so remain until otherwise ordered by the society.

The triennial election of members of the council resulted in the reelection of all the former members. The society then adjourned to the Senate Chamber, where Professor Clarence W. Alvord, of the University of Illinois and the Illinois State Historical Library, delivered the annual address on "The Relation of the State to Historical Work." This part of the meeting was open to the public and an audience of about eighty comfortably filled the Senate Chamber.

At the meeting of the executive council on February 8, officers for the triennium 1915-1918 were elected as follows: Charles P. Noyes, president; Gideon S. Ives, first vice-president; Frederic A. Fogg, second vice-president; Solon J. Buck, secretary; and Everett H. Bailey, treasurer.

The committee on revision of the by-laws, Messrs. Sanborn, Ingersoll, and Buck, appointed by President Lightner in accordance with the resolution adopted by the society at the annual meeting, reported a draft of a new set of by-laws. This was read and, in accordance with the provision for amendment in the old by-laws, was laid over for one month. The new by-laws, if adopted at the March meeting of the council, will be printed in the *Biennial Report*.

A paper on "The Minnesota State Archives, their Character, Condition, and Historical Value" by Herbert A. Kellar, instructor in history in the University of Minnesota, will be read at the meeting of the council on April 12. This will be an open meeting and all members of the society and others interested are invited to attend in the reading room of the society's library at 8:30 P.M.

#### PUBLICATION PLANS

The MINNESOTA HISTORY BULLETIN has been established primarily for the purpose of keeping the members, and others who may be interested, in touch with the work of the Minnesota Historical Society. It is believed that the timely publication of papers read at the meetings or contributed will have considerable advantages over the method of accumulating such material for a series of years and then publishing it in a bulky volume of *Collections*. Besides such papers the BULLETIN will contain reviews of books pertinent to Minnesota history, notes on the activities of the society, perhaps occasional documents or reprints, and miscellaneous matter of various sorts. No attempt will be made to have a uniform number of pages in each issue; thus the temptation to publish articles of slight value in order to fill up space will be avoided. The issues and pages

will be numbered consecutively and when about five hundred pages have been printed, a title page and an index will be issued for the first volume and the second begun.

The publication of the miscellaneous material in the BULLETIN will make possible the reservation of the *Collections* for more unified and extensive works, the greater part of which will be documentary in character. Plans are being developed for various series in the *Collections*, each of which will have to do with a period or phase of Minnesota history and will contain all the documentary material available on the subject, and not elsewhere readily accessible in print and well edited. Work has been started on a series which will contain the messages and proclamations of the governors of Minnesota and on a bibliographical series. One volume of the latter will probably consist of a list, with descriptions and references to files, of Minnesota newspapers and periodicals, and another will be a bibliography of the works of Minnesota authors.

Volume 15 of the *Collections*, which has been edited by Mr. Upham, will be distributed in a few weeks. It contains papers read at meetings of the society and the executive council, and obituaries of deceased members from 1908 to 1914 inclusive. Mr. Upham has plans for extensive archeological work which, it is hoped, will result in time in the completion of volume 16, the first part of which, the work of Professor N. H. Winchell, was published in 1913.

Professor William W. Folwell, first president of the University of Minnesota and the author of *Minnesota, the North Star State* in the *American Commonwealths* series, has practically completed the manuscript of a new history of Minnesota. This history, which will probably consist of three volumes, will be published by the society.

#### THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BUILDING

For many years the work of the society has been hampered by the inadequacy of its quarters in the basement of the Capi-

tol. Thousands of books and numberless pictures and museum articles have had to be stored in boxes in the sub-basement or left in the Old Capitol where they are in constant danger of destruction by fire, while members of the staff have had to work in all sorts of cubby-holes and dark corners. Finally, after much earnest effort on the part of members of the society and of others who believe in the preservation of the materials for the history of the state, the legislature of 1913 appropriated five hundred thousand dollars for the construction of a building for the society and the Supreme Court.

In accordance with the terms of this bill a site was purchased and paid for with money from the private funds of the society, turned over to the state for that purpose. An architect was selected who, with members of the Supreme Court and the secretary of the society, visited buildings of a similar character in the neighboring states for the purpose of ascertaining what was necessary in the construction of the proposed building. After this and other investigations, it was found, from estimates made by the architect, that a building suitable and adequate for both the society and the Supreme Court could not be constructed within the limits of the appropriation. The Supreme Court, in view of this situation and also of the protest of the State Bar Association against its removal from the Capitol, finally reached the conclusion that it preferred to remain in its present quarters, particularly if, by the removal of the historical society from the Capitol, it could secure added space there.

As a result of this situation it was decided to apply to the legislature for an amendment to the act of 1913, eliminating the Supreme Court, providing for the care and preservation of the state archives in the proposed building, and also providing that any part of the building not in use or actually needed for the purposes of the society, might be used for other state purposes under the direction of the governor. A bill to this effect has been introduced in both houses of the legislature. Another bill, however, providing for the repeal *in toto* of the

act of 1913 has been introduced into the House, and both of these measures will come up for consideration by that body in the near future.

#### STATE AND LOCAL ARCHIVES

The American people are slowly awakening to the necessity of giving some attention to the care and preservation of the national, state, and local archives. As a result of the work of the Public Archives Commission established by the American Historical Association some fifteen years ago, the archives of about thirty of the American states have been examined and reported upon by competent men. These reports, containing more or less complete inventories of the material found, have been published in the *Annual Reports* of the American Historical Association.

The commission has made several attempts to secure such a report for Minnesota, but nothing was done until a few months ago when the Minnesota Historical Society agreed to coöperate with the commission in forwarding the work. The assistance of Mr. Herbert A. Kellar, instructor in history in the University of Minnesota, was secured and considerable progress has already been made. Most of the offices, vaults, and storerooms in the New Capitol and some in the Old Capitol have been examined and preliminary lists of the material found have been made.

As this work progresses, it becomes more and more evident that the present system of caring for the files of state records not in current use is inefficient, unscientific, and wasteful of space and of the time of public officials and employees. In the early days when the population of the state was small and its activities few, the quantity of records or archives was not great and it made little difference how they were cared for. Today, however, with the increased population and functions of the state, the care of these records has become a problem, the seriousness of which is not always fully realized.

For a variety of reasons the existing non-current records

and many current ones are in considerable confusion. Many documents or files of value not only for history but also for record purposes appear to be missing or incomplete, and the finding of specific documents often involves days of search. This situation is not so much the fault of the officials in charge as of the system. No one has been especially interested in the older records and frequent changes in personnel have resulted in ignorance of previous arrangements and in changes in methods of filing. Records little used have been packed away in vaults or storerooms, often unprotected from dirt and damp, and if they were arranged at first in some semblance of order, that condition has not lasted long. Fortunately the records in the New Capitol are not in danger of destruction by fire, unless, as has happened in other states, some of them should be consigned to the flames by officials ignorant of their value. Many documents, however, are rapidly disintegrating as a result of exposure to dirt and damp, while the archives which have been left in the Old Capitol are constantly in danger of destruction by a conflagration.

The remedy for this condition is to be sought in the experience of European countries and the older states of the Union. Practically all the states of Europe maintain archives bureaus where non-current records are classified and cared for by experts, and some American states—notably our neighbor, Iowa—have done the same with excellent results. Just as the state has an auditor who keeps the accounts for all departments, and a treasurer to handle the funds for all departments, so it should make provision for some agency whose business it would be to look after the records of all departments.

As the non-current records are likely to be consulted most by investigators into the history of the state, although it not infrequently happens that they have a more immediately practical use, it is quite fitting that the Minnesota Historical Society, an institution which has been collecting and caring for materials relating to the history of Minnesota ever since the organization of the territory, should be established as a State Depart-

ment of Archives and History and put in charge of this work. The society would, if given the requisite authority and funds, establish a separate archives department under the direction of a competent archivist and in the course of time the old records of the state would be cleaned, arranged, filed, and made accessible not only to historical students but to the public officials themselves.

The officers of the society, believing that a beginning should be made at once in this important work, have drawn up the following bill (House File no. 564) which was introduced by Hon. Charles A. Gilman, and is now in the hands of the House committee on state and other libraries.

A bill for an Act to Establish the Minnesota Historical Society as a State Department of Archives and History and to Provide for the Collection and Administration of Archives, Public Records, and Historical Material.

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Minnesota:*

Section 1. The Minnesota Historical Society is hereby established as a Department of Archives and History of the State of Minnesota, and is authorized to hold property in trust for the state.

Section 2. The said society is authorized to receive and is hereby made the custodian of such records, files, documents, books, and papers as may be turned over to it from any of the public offices of the state, including state, county, city, village, and township offices. It shall provide for their preservation, classification, arranging, and indexing, so that they may be made available for the use of the public. Copies of all such papers, documents, files, and records, when made out and certified to by the superintendent of said society, shall be admitted as evidence in all courts, with the same effect as if certified to by the original custodian thereof.

Section 3. All public officials are hereby authorized to turn over to the said society such records, files, documents, books, and papers in their custody as are not in current use.

Section 4. The said society shall, so far as practicable, cause an inspection to be made of the current records of the public offices in the state, including state, county, city, village, and township

offices; shall investigate the practices in other states with reference to the making and preservation of records and the inspection thereof; and shall include in its next biennial report recommendations for such legislation as it may deem necessary to secure the proper making and preservation of state and local records.

**Section 5.** The said society shall make a biennial report in January of each odd year to the governor of the state, which report shall treat of the historical and archival interests of the state and set forth the character and extent of the work of the society during the preceding biennium.

**Section 6.** All acts and parts of acts inconsistent with this act are hereby repealed.

**Section 7.** This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage.

It will be noted that the bill relates not only to state but also to local archives. The situation in many of the courthouses of the state is probably as bad as, if not worse than, that in the Capitol. In the state of Illinois an extensive investigation carried on during the last three years by the Illinois State Historical Library showed clearly the need of action on the part of the state along the line of supervision of the making and preservation of county records. It is doubtful if the situation is much better in Minnesota, and certainly it should be looked into, for these local records are of vital importance to the people of the state.

Another point to be noted is that there is nothing mandatory about the proposed measure; officials are not required to turn over anything which they deem it desirable to retain in their offices, but they are authorized to transfer to the society, as the archives department of the state, the non-current records which, in most cases, are only a burden to them. Nor is the society required to take over at once whatever may be offered. Obviously the transfer should be made only so rapidly as the material received can be classified and arranged. In Iowa some officials were unwilling to turn over material at first, but they soon discovered the convenience of having the records cared

for by experts and now the archivist has difficulty in restraining them from transferring the material more rapidly than he can care for it.

Attention should be given also to the making of current records, for the present and future must be considered as well as the past. Much time and space could doubtless be saved and more valuable results achieved by improved methods and systems of making both state and local records. Still more important is the matter of the permanence of the materials used. Because of the inferior quality of paper, ink, or typewriter ribbons, many public records of importance are rapidly becoming illegible and much money has been spent in making copies. The proposed law would pave the way for an investigation of this whole subject and perhaps result in saving to the people of the state not only considerable sums of money but also important records, which no amount of money can replace once they are gone.

Business men and corporations provide carefully for the making, classification, and care of their records, in order that they may be readily accessible and that their preservation may be insured. Intelligent men everywhere carefully preserve files of their correspondence and other documents not only for practical purposes but for their personal, biographical, or historical value. The state and its subdivisions spend large sums of money in making records and it would seem to be but a policy of enlightened self-interest to give careful consideration to their preservation and accessibility.



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