

## RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The state historical societies of Wisconsin and Minnesota began their careers in the same year, 1849, one year after Wisconsin became a state and while Minnesota was just entering the territorial status with nine years to wait before it should be admitted to the Union. During the threescore odd years of its existence the State Historical Society of Wisconsin has constantly held the lead among similar institutions of the West, serving the people not only of the state but of the whole country by gathering and preserving an invaluable collection of manuscripts, by building up a great library and an excellent museum, by extensive and scholarly research and publication, and by stimulating an interest in history throughout the West. Various factors have entered into this success, not the least important of which is the liberal financial support which the society has received from the state, especially since the construction, fifteen years ago, of the magnificent building in which it is now housed. Equally important, and in part an explanation of this liberal support, is the fact that the destinies of the society have been guided during the greater part of its career by two remarkably able men, Lyman Copeland Draper and Reuben Gold Thwaites. The death of Dr. Thwaites in October, 1913, was followed by the appointment of Dr. Milo M. Quaife as superintendent, and the volume before us<sup>1</sup> gives every indication that the services of the society will be not only continued but extended under his direction. To the members and friends of the Minnesota Historical Society, which is soon to be housed in a new building and, it is hoped, to enter on a career of increased usefulness, a review of the present condition and activ-

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings* of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin at its sixty-second annual meeting held October 22, 1914 (Madison, 1915. 286 p.).

ities of its twin sister in an adjoining state, as set forth in the latest volume of *Proceedings*, ought to offer encouragement and valuable suggestions.

The staff of the Wisconsin Historical Society consists of the superintendent, an assistant superintendent, eight heads of research, order, catalogue, reference, newspaper, manuscript, public document, and museum divisions, and fifteen assistants—twenty-five in all—besides sixteen caretakers under state civil service control. So large a staff naturally calls for a considerable maintenance fund, and for the year 1913-14 the society received from the state \$70,948. Of this sum \$12,209 was returned to the insurance fund of the state, so that the amount actually available for the maintenance of the society and its building was \$58,739, an increase of \$11,239 over the amount available during the preceding year. The actual expenditure for the year, exclusive of the insurance items, was \$50,331, of which \$36,936 was for salaries and other services; \$5,978 for books, periodicals, furniture, and museum exhibits; and \$1,790 for printing and illustration. In the spring of 1914 a new wing of the society's building was completed at a cost of \$162,000. The total cost of the building as it now stands has been \$782,000, and it is doubtful if it could be constructed to-day for less than a million dollars.

In addition to state appropriations the society has private funds amounting to \$85,970, divided into a general and binding fund of \$38,283, an antiquarian fund of \$18,468, and seven other funds devoted to special purposes. The receipts for membership fees and the sale of duplicates are divided between the first two of these funds. Part of the income of the different funds is regularly used for the specified purposes, and the balances at the end of each year are added to the funds. Among recent bequests to the society are about \$12,000 from Mrs. Kittie E. V. Hollister, and \$10,000 from Dr. Thwaites.

The estimated strength of the society's library is 375,000 titles, nearly equally divided between books and pamphlets. Accessions during the year ending September 30, 1914, were

5,084 books, 5,588 pamphlets, and 262 engravings, photographs, and maps, a total of 10,934. Seventy-three per cent of the accessions were gifts, and the remainder, purchases and exchanges. The large proportion of gifts is due in part to the activity of the society in collecting documents of states, municipalities, and organizations, as well as the publications of the United States and foreign countries. The document and newspaper divisions of the library are growing so rapidly that, notwithstanding the recent construction of the new wing, it is estimated that all the space available for these departments will be filled in three or four years.

The great collection of Draper Manuscripts is well known to historical scholars, but this is by no means the only important manuscript material possessed by the society. Collections of papers of men of prominence in the building of the West, diaries, sometimes in the original and sometimes copies, and miscellaneous documents of all sorts are constantly coming in. All of these are carefully arranged, filed, catalogued, and thus made accessible to students; unless, as occasionally happens, the donor request that they be withheld from the public for a certain period. The most notable recent addition of manuscripts consists of the Civil War papers of the governor's office. In accordance with the general authority conferred by an act of 1913 Governor McGovern turned over these papers—several thousand in number—to the society, thus relieving his office of the care and housing of the material and, at the same time, making it accessible to historical investigators. Another important collection secured by the society comprises the papers of the late Luman H. Weller of Iowa. Congressman Weller was actively identified with the Greenback and Populist parties and the labor movement, and his papers, together with the Donnelly Papers, recently acquired by the Minnesota Historical Society, offer a wealth of material to some historian of radicalism in the Northwest.

The newspaper division of the library receives regularly about three hundred papers published in the state and two hun-

dred from outside. Especially important for the student of economic history is its large and growing collection of trade journals and labor papers. In addition to these current accessions about one hundred volumes of old files were acquired by gift, exchange, or purchase during the year. Of especial interest among these are complete files of two papers published in Nashville, Tennessee, as the organs of the two parties during the exciting presidential campaign of 1840. Illustrative of the value, other than historical, of preserving newspaper files is the fact that papers from the society's collection were twice used in important lawsuits during the year. One of these was a case before a United States court in a far-western state, and the society's file of the paper needed was the only one which could be located.

It is a truism to those familiar with large libraries that they are of little value unless carefully and scientifically classified and catalogued, but it is difficult for a layman to realize the amount of labor involved in this work. The cataloguing staff of the Wisconsin Historical Society numbers five trained workers, but the force is said to be inadequate to the task in hand. The growth of the general catalogue necessitated the purchase of an additional case of 312 trays, making 936 now in use, each with a capacity of a thousand cards. Special catalogues of documents, genealogies, labor union material, and maps, manuscripts, and illustrations are kept up. This division has charge, also, of "a Wisconsin biography catalogue, listing biographies, obituaries, and portraits of prominent Wisconsin men," which is frequently consulted by newspaper men.

The main product of the research and publication division is the monumental set of *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, numbering twenty volumes. For many years these have consisted entirely of original material, while papers read at meetings and contributed have been published in the annual volume of *Proceedings*. A comprehensive analytical index to the *Collections* has been in preparation for a number of years and will soon be published. This will be followed in the course of time by

another volume which will complete a series on the fur-trade in Wisconsin. Much of the material for this series comes from the archives of the United States government, and the society has for some time had an agent at work in Washington searching for Wisconsin material. Thousands of documents selected have been transcribed or reproduced by means of the photostat. This work is not confined to fur-trade material, but a clean sweep is being made of documents in the government archives of value for the history of the state. Copies have also been secured of much Wisconsin material in the Canadian archives, either for publication or for preservation in the society's manuscript collection.

Custodians of large collections of historical manuscripts are coming more and more to recognize the importance of calendaring the papers, and the Wisconsin Historical Society has set an excellent example by issuing a calendar volume of part of the Draper Manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> This volume has been in preparation for several years and another is now under way. Part of the documents in this collection dealing with the West during the Revolutionary period are being published in the *Draper Series*, of which three volumes have been issued and a fourth is in preparation. The expense of this publication is borne by the Wisconsin Society, Sons of the American Revolution.

Another field in which there has been considerable publishing activity during the last decade is that of Wisconsin Civil War history. Some time ago the legislature created a separate Wisconsin Historical Commission to exploit this field, but this commission has always been in practice an adjunct of the society, and the legislature of 1913 terminated its existence and devolved its functions upon the society. The last publication of the commission was *An Artilleryman's Diary* by Jenkins Lloyd Jones (Madison, 1914. 395 p.), a work of great historical value. A social and economic history of the state during the war by Frederick Merk of the society's research staff, a

<sup>1</sup> *Preston and Virginia Papers* (Wisconsin Historical Society, *Publications, Calendar Series*, 1. Madison, 1915).

study which was started for the commission, is now nearing completion and will be published by the society.

An innovation on the part of the new superintendent is the publication of a monthly editor's news letter "designed to disseminate correct and timely information on matters of interest to the Society, and on historical subjects generally." This is sent to over three hundred papers, many of which use it, in part at least, for copy. The society supplies, also, each month to the press editor of the University of Wisconsin an historical article of almost a thousand words, copies of which are distributed to forty-two metropolitan papers throughout the country for publication in their Sunday issues. The superintendent believes "that this work constitutes a real, although modest, educational service to the state and the public generally. This will seem true especially to those who, like the writer, have frequently groaned in spirit over the amazing capacity of the typical metropolitan reporter for disseminating misinformation when he chances to deal with historical subjects."

The work of the research and publication division will undoubtedly be facilitated by the rearrangement of the building, made possible by the construction of the new wing. The museum floor of this wing is now available for an auditorium when one is needed, and the old auditorium, which was never adequate as such, has been cut up into a suite of rooms for the research workers. Five members of the staff devote a part or all of their time to this division, and it is expected that one or two additional research assistants will be appointed in the near future.

The leading position of the museum of the Wisconsin Historical Society is widely recognized, and it is frequently visited by curators of similar institutions in other states in search of suggestions. The construction of the new wing furnished additional space for exhibits and made possible the construction of an adequate museum office. Many new exhibition cases were installed during the year, and the collection was largely rearranged. Of especial interest and educational value are the

New England kitchen and the pioneer drug store. Considerable emphasis is laid on special exhibits, thirty of which were held during the year. These were along such diverse lines as old-fashioned Christmas gifts and material illustrative of Christmas customs in foreign lands; Civil War material for a Grand Army encampment; Ainu, Chinese, and Japanese objects; bookplates and bookmarks; American agricultural machinery, 1840-60; postage stamps; and Japanese wood-block prints. Four successful exhibitions were held in the museum rooms by the Madison Art Association, one of them consisting of a collection of oil paintings illustrative of upper Mississippi River scenery by Frederick G. Sylvester. These special exhibits regularly attract large numbers of visitors to the museum and add greatly to its value.

The educational possibilities of a well-arranged museum are coming to be recognized by school-teachers, and forty-two classes, with a total of almost a thousand pupils, visited the rooms during five months. Nearly one half of these came from twenty cities and villages outside of Madison. All of the classes are accompanied by their teachers and are guided by members of the staff. Considerable use is made of the museum, also, by classes in the university, and the curator occasionally conducts excursions to sites of historical and archeological interest. One of these was composed of about one hundred teachers from all over the state, who were in attendance at the university summer school.

The concluding section of the report of the executive committee, which is practically the superintendent's report, is entitled "A Proposal for an Archives and Library Building," and deals with a problem which will soon be a pressing one in each of the American states: Shall the rapidly accumulating mass of newspaper files, documentary publications, and manuscript archives or public records be preserved, and, if so, how shall this be accomplished? Throughout the civilized world except in America the first part of the question has been answered in the affirmative, and buildings have been constructed or set aside

for the purpose of housing the national and local archives. The printed documents and newspaper files are usually cared for in the regular libraries. In America little attention has been paid to the preservation of newspaper files; few of the states have complete collections of their own published documents, to say nothing of the documents published by counties and cities, other states, the federal government, and foreign nations; while nearly every governmental office, national, state, or local, is burdened with a mass of old records and papers which receive little care and are likely to be destroyed to make room for more current material.

While the problem of storage space need not be a pressing one in Minnesota for a number of years after the construction of the building for the historical society, it will inevitably reappear in time, and Dr. Quaife's proposal is worthy of consideration. "The present Library building," he writes, "is a splendid structure—necessarily, therefore, it is an expensive structure. It would be possible to construct a plain, yet dignified and equally roomy building at much less cost than the present one. These observations are made with no view to disparaging the wisdom of the men responsible for the present building; in common with all other Wisconsin citizens the writer is immensely proud of it. In no other way could Wisconsin have advertised herself to the world more favorably or profitably than by the construction and maintenance of this magnificent temple of intellectual endeavor. Fully recognizing this, the question still presents itself, is the state willing to spend the money necessary for providing with equal liberality for the future growth of the Library? If willing, is it wise and necessary that it should do so?"

The original plan of the building of the Wisconsin Historical Society contemplated still another addition across the back which would make it a hollow square. Instead of the construction of this addition, when more space is needed, it is proposed "to make provision for the growth of the Library by removing the public document and the newspaper and periodi-



cal divisions, which are of especially lusty growth, from the present building and housing them in an adjoining and more economical structure. At an expenditure equal to the sum which the Park Street addition will cost such a structure could be erected as would meet the needs of the situation from the Library point of view for a full generation yet to come. Further than this, if situated and planned, as it should be, to admit of future additions, provision would be afforded for indefinite growth.

"Thus far the situation has been considered from the view point of the Library alone. That the State will refuse to provide reasonably for its future growth is inconceivable. How such provision may be made to the best advantage is the only point to be considered. The suggestion already advanced finds its strongest reinforcement in the consideration of another and, probably, more important problem of State administration."

"The new State Capitol is a much more splendid building than the Library, and eight times as costly. Unlike the Library building, its design admits of no additions to provide space for future needs of government. Ten years ago the State of Minnesota erected a similar building, regarded by the citizens of the State with pride similar to that which we manifest concerning our own splendid seat of government. Long since the building has proved inadequate to house the various branches of the State government. A recent legislature provided for the construction of a building adjacent to the Capitol at a cost of \$450,000, to house certain of these branches.<sup>1</sup> In our own case, if popular report can be credited, our new Capitol building is becoming overcrowded even before its completion. It scarcely requires statement that before a decade has elapsed Wisconsin will be brought face to face with the same embarrass-

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Quaife evidently had in mind the act of 1913, appropriating not \$450,000, but \$500,000 for a building for the Minnesota Historical Society and the Supreme Court. As amended by the last general assembly, the act now provides for a "building for and adapted to the use of the Minnesota historical society and for the care, preservation and protection of the state archives."

ment from lack of space in the Capitol to house the various departments of government, which our neighboring state has already experienced.

“One method of postponing this embarrassment, and the consequent necessity of removing branches of the State government to other buildings, would be to relieve the Capitol of the great masses of state records that have accumulated during the eighty years since Wisconsin became a separate political entity. Their removal to an archives building would redound to the advantage of all the various interests concerned. The overcrowded vaults and filing cases of the various offices, relieved of the masses of material whose usefulness from the view point of current administration has ceased, would provide ample accommodation for the more recent State records and those which are needed in the daily administration of the government.

“Leaving out of account the important consideration of economizing space in the Capitol building, a positive administrative gain would result from such a disposition of the State records. Wisconsin’s records are fairly complete. They have suffered much less than have the records of most of the states from such agencies of destruction as fires, removals, improper housing, and indifference on the part of their custodians. While this is true, their system of arrangement—conspicuous in many cases for lack of system—is bad. From the view point of administrative efficiency and economy a decided improvement would follow upon their collection and orderly arrangement and indexing in a suitable archives building.

“Assuming the desirability of this, it is obvious that both administrative and scholarly considerations demand that the building be erected in proximity to the Historical Library and be administered by the Library staff. Wisconsin is conspicuous among the sisterhood of states for the care with which her historical interests are conserved and cultivated. Nor is this a recent development, for the State Historical Society is but one year younger than the State itself. There is no good reason why the professional training and knowledge of the Historical

Society staff should not be utilized to the utmost by the State. In the nature of things this professional training qualifies the staff to administer the State records better than can possibly be done by the ever-changing procession of State officials, who not only lack continuity of tenure and professional training, but whose time and interests are devoted to other and quite different problems. Another consideration worth noting is that by entrusting the State records to the care of the Historical Society centralization of system and housing will succeed the present multiplicity of systems and diversity of storage places.

“From the view point of the scholarly and historical interests involved such a combination of the State archives with the Historical Library would be wholly admirable. Archival materials are as the potter’s clay to students of government, economics, history, sociology, and the allied branches. At the present time, although the State’s archives are less than a mile away from our great University, they might almost as well be non-existent so far as any use of them by scholars is concerned. In a recent conversation the senior professor of American history in the University stated that it was practically useless to send any of his students to the Capitol to consult them. Nor is this intended as a reflection upon the attitude of the officials in charge of the various branches of the State government. However willing they may be—and they are, as a rule, an uncommonly courteous group of men—they are practically helpless to assist the student in his quest. A concrete illustration may be afforded by the recent experience of the writer. With the Governor’s permission to remove certain Civil War documents from the executive office to the Historical Library he repaired, with one assistant, to the Capitol to do the work of selecting them. The obliging attendant succeeded in finding one chair, and clearing half of one small table for the use of the two workers, and with such accommodations the work of sorting was done. Were the State records housed in proximity to the Historical Library and made accessible to students the change would con-

stitute an advantage to the scholarly interests of the State, whose importance can scarcely be overestimated.

"That such a plan of administering the State archives is by no means novel, appears from an examination of the practice pursued in other states. To mention only a few, Iowa has a Memorial Building which houses the State Historical collections and library and the archives, both under the custody of the curator of the State Historical Society.<sup>1</sup> South Dakota has a department of history and archives, a branch of the State government, housed in the Capitol. Alabama has also a department of history and archives. In some states the natural process of local evolution has brought forth a different arrangement, while in still others the care of the records and the preservation of materials for State and local history have been left largely to chance. In Wisconsin, considerations alike of administrative efficiency, of economy, of scholarly interest, and of local evolution all unite to favor such a solution of the archives and Historical Library problems as has been suggested."

The extended influence which a vigorous state historical society can exert is illustrated by the existence in Wisconsin of a number of active local historical societies affiliated with and reporting to the state society. Reports from six of these are published in the volume of *Proceedings* before us and indicate possible lines of work for such institutions. Thus, the Green Bay Historical Society held a meeting to commemorate the centennial of the writing of "The Star Spangled Banner." It has a committee investigating the origin of the names of streets in the city and is building up a collection of books, maps, and original documents relating to the locality. The La Fayette County society has a small library, a museum, and a manuscript collection. A most important line of work which local histori-

<sup>1</sup> This should read "the curator of the Historical Department." The State Historical Society of Iowa is an entirely distinct institution, devoted mainly to research, but with a good working library housed in one of the university buildings at Iowa City.

cal societies could take up is indicated by a statement in the report of this institution that "a store room in the courthouse contains a mass of old documents and records that should be classified." The Sauk County society held three meetings during the year at which papers in local history were read, besides a winter picnic and an annual outing or historical excursion. The society also erected a bronze tablet on the site of the first church in Baraboo. The Walworth County society has been gathering the personal recollections of pioneers and searching the back files of local newspapers for "data relating to early settlers, their family connections, their business enterprises, and their usefulness." The Waukesha County society has been instrumental in securing the erection of a monument to the three Cushing brothers, Civil War heroes, and is now working for a Cushing Memorial Park.

The Wisconsin Historical Society holds regularly but one meeting a year—in October. At this meeting it is customary to have an address by some distinguished historical scholar, usually from outside the state, after which a number of historical papers are read by title only. These, together with the address, are then published in the annual volume of *Proceedings*. In 1914 the address was by Worthington C. Ford, editor in the Massachusetts Historical Society, on the subject "The Treaty of Ghent—and After." Mr. Ford has been engaged for some time in editing the papers of John Quincy Adams and, using this material, he brings out many interesting points and throws some new light on the negotiations which brought the War of 1812 to a close.

Among the papers, one by Dr. Eben D. Pierce is of almost as much interest for Minnesota as for Wisconsin history. It is entitled "James Allen Reed: First Permanent Settler in Trempealeau County and Founder of Trempealeau." Reed was a Kentuckian who came to the upper-Mississippi region about 1815. For a time he was a soldier in the regular army and was stationed at Fort Crawford (Prairie du Chien). Then he became an employee of the American Fur Company and later

a tavern keeper. From 1842 to 1848 he served as government farmer for Wapasha's band of Sioux Indians on the site of Winona, Minnesota. His second wife was a relative of Wapasha, and he acquired considerable prestige with the tribe. Many of the incidents recounted in the paper are based on recollections which may or may not be reliable, but the paper furnishes an outline at least of an interesting career and a valuable picture of frontier conditions.

Another paper, of considerable length, on "The Taverns and Stages of Early Wisconsin," by J. H. A. Lacher, presents a mass of detailed information upon important phases of economic and social history. While the treatment is confined to Wisconsin, it is certain that somewhat similar conditions prevailed in Minnesota during the corresponding periods. Numerous excellent illustrations and extracts from original documents enhance the value of the paper. It is a fine thing that a man should be willing to devote himself to collecting and working up the mass of materials on which this paper is based, and every encouragement should be offered to induce others who are competent to undertake similar tasks.

Frederick Merk has a paper in the volume on "The Labor Movement in Wisconsin during the Civil War," which is a careful study based on documentary material. This is followed by "A Semi-historical Account of the War of the Winnebago and the Foxes," a legend in the Winnebago language as told by Joseph Blowsnake in 1908, with translation and notes by Paul Radin. The volume closes with a very important document for the history of the Northwest during the post-Revolutionary period: Henry Hay's "Journal from Detroit to the Miami River." This is edited with introduction and notes by Dr. Quaife under the title "A Narrative of Life on the Old Frontier." This journal, the original of which is in the Detroit Public Library, has been known to scholars for some time, but its publication is a distinct service.

In contemplating the extensive and successful work of the Wisconsin Historical Society, the institutions in the other west-

ern states, many of which have had to contend with poverty and lack of interest, should not be discouraged. What has been done in Wisconsin can be done elsewhere, perhaps in a somewhat different way. While the Wisconsin society serves in a measure the historical interests of the whole West, it can not and does not desire to preëempt the field. Each society has the history of its own state as a special field, but each should also specialize in certain phases of national or western history, for the history of all the individual states does not make up a history of the nation or of the West. The field is large, and there is work in plenty for all the individuals and institutions which can be enlisted. With cordial coöperation and consistent effort on the part of all, the foundations will finally be laid upon which will rest the future interpretation of the history of the great Mississippi Valley.

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MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ST. PAUL



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