

THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1928¹

Steady progress in the work of collecting and preserving materials for the history of Minnesota and the Northwest, making them accessible to those who want to use them, and promoting historical-mindedness on the part of the people characterizes the record of the Minnesota Historical Society for 1928.

As usual two public meetings were held during the year, the annual meeting in St. Paul in January and the summer convention in June, which took place in Brainerd and its vicinity. Accounts of these meetings have been published in the society's magazine, but attention should be called to the fact that such meetings, each with a number of sessions, bring several hundred people into direct contact with the activities of the society and furnish a basis for newspaper publicity that reaches a much wider audience. Both of these results were achieved in exceptional measure by the summer convention of 1928, the first because of its peripatetic character and the second because of the hearty coöperation of the *Minneapolis Journal*, which assigned a competent reporter to the convention and tour, and of the Associated Press, which arranged for reports by telephone and sent out well-written stories. The papers of Brainerd and Crosby also gave much space to the convention, and other papers made use of the Associated Press dispatches.

A regular feature of the annual meeting in January for the last eight years has been a conference on local history work. At the first two of these conferences the discussion was of things hoped for rather than things achieved, for almost no local history work was being done in the state, and the attend-

¹ Read at the annual meeting of the society on January 21, 1929. *Ed.*

ance was very small. At the second of these conferences a model constitution for a county historical society was presented; soon thereafter the St. Louis County society was formed; and the third conference was attended by fifty people representing local history interests in eleven counties. Since then the number of county societies has risen from two or three to about fourteen, several more are just over the horizon, and it is reasonable to infer that the conferences and the summer meetings in different parts of the state have had much to do with this development. The 1928 conference developed the fact that most of the county societies lack adequate quarters and maintenance funds; and several of their representatives organized as a committee to work for legislation authorizing county boards to provide quarters and make appropriations for maintenance.

Despite the enrollment of 163 new active members of the society in 1928, as compared with 108 in 1927, the net gain was only 20. Deaths of active members numbered 40 and 103 were dropped from the rolls, but 2 who had been dropped in previous years were reinstated. The total membership at the end of the year was 1,562, including 8 honorary, 52 corresponding, 12 institutional, and 1,490 active members; and adding the 168 schools and libraries that subscribe to the society's publications makes a total of 1,730 members and subscribers. The dropping of 103 members in 1928 as compared with 33 in 1927 is explained in part by the fact that a number who should have been dropped in 1927 were inadvertently kept on the rolls; but even so the loss is greater than it should be, and is probably due in part to the fact that no major publication was issued for a period of two years. The problem of retaining members is now being studied and it is hoped that ways and means can be devised to prevent so large a loss in the future.

An unusual feature of the membership campaign during the year was the distribution to selected banks throughout the

state of placards calling attention to the opportunities offered by membership. Almost without exception the bank officers were willing to display the cards and to keep a supply of application blanks on hand, but the results thus far in new members have been very meager. In general it may be said that the best results are obtained from invitations sent to people at the suggestion of present members.

The income received from members is small in proportion to the cost of the publications that are distributed to them. The two dollars a year received from each of the 871 annual members is only a very moderate subscription price for the quarterly magazine, and the single fee of twenty-five dollars paid by each of the 506 life members brings in, when invested, a still smaller sum. The 85 sustaining members pay five dollars each a year, but after six payments, they too are enrolled as life members. It is gratifying, however, to be able to report that the number of contributing-life members, who pay five dollars or more annually, increased during the year from 14 to 25. The number of patrons, who contribute fifty dollars or more annually, was reduced from 4 to 3 by death. The dues should not be made so high as to exclude anyone really interested in the work of the society; but, in view of the depreciation in the value of the dollar since they were fixed, it would seem to be advisable to raise the annual dues to three dollars and the life membership fee to fifty. It is to be hoped, moreover, that enough of the present life members who can afford to do so will become patrons or contributing-life members to increase materially the income from these groups.

Besides the usual periodical publications consisting of the monthly clip sheet for newspapers, the quarterly *Check List of Minnesota Public Documents*, and the quarterly magazine, the society published in 1928 the first of two volumes on *Minnesota in the War with Germany* by Franklin F. Holbrook and Livia Appel. The volume appeared too late in the year for reviews to be available now, and the distribution to members

has not been completed. It is an attractive book of 375 pages with twelve illustrations and is believed to be an important contribution to the interpretation of the general history of the United States in the World War.

The four numbers of the magazine, *MINNESOTA HISTORY*, constitute volume 9 and the fourteenth year of that publication and will make with the index a book of about 460 pages. The fact that the magazine published during the year contributions, including reviews, from thirty-two people including twenty-four not on the staff, is a notable indication of widespread interest in its field. The plan of issuing the index separately was adopted a year ago to prevent delay in the publication of the last number and to save money by reducing the size of the issue. All members and subscribers who desire the index are supplied with copies free of charge or with bound volumes including the index in exchange for their unbound copies at a cost of fifty cents. The material published in *MINNESOTA HISTORY* is of permanent rather than current value and a complete file with the detailed indexes constitutes a veritable encyclopedia of the history of Minnesota and the Northwest.

The next major publications of the society will be volume 4 of Dr. Folwell's *History of Minnesota*, copy for which is being edited about as rapidly as it is received from the author, and volume 2 of the war history. It is hoped that both of them can be issued during 1929; and then, with these two important series completed, it will be possible to make a start on the series of documentary publications that has long been contemplated. The assembling and typing of material for a volume on Indian missions to 1845 has been about completed under the direction of Dr. Nute, and editorial work upon it is under way; copy for the proposed bibliography of Minnesota newspapers and inventory of files probably will also be ready as soon as funds are available for its publication; and tentative plans have been made for a number of other volumes.

The number of books, pamphlets, and bound volumes of newspapers added to the library in 1928 was 2,838, an increase

of 269 over 1927. The gifts — including newspapers, which are contributed by the publishers but bound by the society, and United States documents, which are technically deposits — make up fifty-eight per cent of the total and account for all the increase. The number of items purchased, 1,017, was practically the same as for 1927, and represented only thirty-six per cent of the total; and the remaining six per cent came in as exchanges from other institutions. The accessions bring the estimated strength of the library to 167,000. Among the notable additions to the library in the year are many old volumes of American travels, some very rare Norwegian pamphlets relating to immigration to America, photostatic copies of two rare volumes of Minnesota interest in the Library of Congress, and a large number of volumes of back files of Minnesota newspapers.

The most important accessions of original manuscripts are some diaries and other papers of Jedediah D. Stevens, the missionary, and the diary and reminiscences of Thomas P. Gere covering his experiences in the Sioux Outbreak and the Civil War. Photostatic reproductions and transcripts acquired include additional correspondence of Minnesota missionaries in the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, bringing the collection down to 1845; over a thousand letters and documents from the papers of the American Fur Company, covering the Minnesota material in that collection through 1842; and nearly as many letters and reports on Indian affairs during the twenties and thirties from the archives of the Indian office and the war department in Washington. Of special note among the many museum objects received by gift is what is believed to be one of the original Red Jacket medals struck off by the United States government in 1792. The picture collection has been increased by 2,481 items, bringing the total to nearly 38,000; and the additions include three fine old daguerreotypes of scenes in and near Minneapolis and an oil painting of the Falls of St. Anthony in 1842.

The steady growth of the collections requires frequent additions of equipment, and two new exhibition cases for the museum, filing cases for pictures, and specially constructed boxes for maps and manuscripts were purchased during the year. Notable progress was made in binding, 1,265 volumes as compared with 951 in 1927; and over a hundred maps were mounted by special assistants. The society's invaluable map collection has long been in a deplorable condition and attempts to remedy this by having maps repaired and mounted by commercial firms have not produced satisfactory results. It was decided, therefore, to obtain the necessary equipment and supplies and have the work done in the building, and the results have been very gratifying. The work will be continued as rapidly as funds permit, and it is thought that the collection can be put into excellent condition and made fully available to students in a few years. Special attention was also given during the year to the rearrangement and rebinding of some of the early volumes of Minnesota newspapers; and in some cases it has been feasible to complete duplicate files with photostats and then withdraw the best original file from use in order to insure its preservation.

The catalogue department of the library was able to put through the incoming books and pamphlets and also to make some progress on the accumulation of uncatalogued material. The number of books and pamphlets catalogued, 2,911, exceeds that of 1927 by 56 and exceeds the current additions, exclusive of newspapers and United States documents, which are not regularly catalogued, by 702. Special attention has been given to Minnesota material and this will be continued until the Minnesota section of the library is adequately catalogued. The uncatalogued accumulations in the so-called "deferred" collection number almost nineteen thousand. Some of these will probably be withdrawn ultimately as not appropriate for the library, but the prospects for completing the cataloguing of the remainder are not very bright; and a

great deal of recataloguing and reclassifying will have to be done before the resources of the library are fully available. Current accessions of manuscripts are cleaned, arranged, and catalogued as they come in, and the inventory of the manuscript collection is making progress. The catalogue of pictures is kept up-to-date and an object catalogue of the museum is being compiled. As usual numerous special exhibits were arranged in the museum and the society had an exhibition in the state departments building at the state fair.

The number of books served to readers in the main reading room, 35,728, is smaller than the corresponding figure for any year since 1922. The decline seems to be due in part to a decrease in the use of the library by genealogists and by undergraduate students in the local colleges; and, in view of the limited staff available for service to readers, it is hardly to be deplored. There seems to have been an increase, however, in the use of books and manuscripts by serious investigators engaged in historical research, especially in the field of Minnesota history. Members of the faculties of at least seven colleges and universities, numerous graduate students working on theses, and several novelists in search of local color used the collections during the year; and the fact that workers in the library and manuscript division included residents of at least seventeen states, the Canal Zone, and Canada would indicate that the value of the society's collections is becoming widely known.

There was no decline but rather an increase in the demands upon the society for information by mail and telephone; and, besides sending out copies of former reports, members of the staff prepared 139 new reports in response to such requests. This is an increase of 17 over 1927, and is larger than for any previous year. The letters of appreciation that are received indicate that this service is well worth while and makes many friends for the society. The file of these reports, which is carefully preserved and indexed, now numbers 740 and is

invaluable for reference work. Over fifty replies made during the year to requests for information about material suitable for use in teaching Minnesota history in the grades are not included in the count because form letters are generally used, and no record has been kept of numerous blanks that have been filled out with information about former Minnesota Congressmen for the committee that is revising the *Biographical Congressional Directory*. Service has also been rendered to various groups in the selection of historic sites for marking and in the preparation of inscriptions.

The number of visitors to the museum during the year, about thirty-three thousand, is normal for a nonlegislative year. The fact that it includes 148 classes and special groups with a total of 4,425 students and teachers indicates that the museum exhibits are meeting a real need in the educational world. The most interesting development in this connection is the project that has been worked out by Mr. Babcock and Mr. W. H. Shepard of the Minneapolis public schools, by which groups of students in the community life and problems courses in the high schools are taken to the museum for study of the exhibits and lectures by the curator, and then report to their classes, which number over twenty-five hundred students. If this arrangement is continued it may be expected that ultimately every graduate of a Minneapolis high school will have some acquaintance with Minnesota history and with the society's museum.

The plan for presenting a series of public lectures last spring similar to those given in the spring of 1927 had to be abandoned because the members of the staff were too busy to take on the extra work involved, but some fifty talks were given by five different members of the staff to clubs and other organizations or over the radio. These included a series of eleven radio talks on the history of Minnesota and the Northwest given by Dr. Nute on Tuesdays from 9:00 to 9:15 A.M. under the auspices of Hamline University, which, according

to reports, were heard by over fourteen thousand high school students as part of their opening exercises.

There have been few changes in the staff during the year, but it seems to have been stricken with an epidemic of leaves. Mr. Babcock was released from his regular duties from February 1 to June 30 to enable him to work on a thesis for the doctorate at Harvard, and Miss Olive Clark, the museum assistant, served as acting curator during that period. Mr. Babcock has also been on a half-time basis since December 1 for the same purpose. The superintendent was given a leave of absence from July 1 to August 15 to enable him to teach in the Harvard summer school, and Dr. Blegen served as acting superintendent. Miss Krausnick has a year's leave of absence beginning September 1 for rest and travel. Part of her work has been taken over by Miss Lois Fawcett, formerly acting librarian of the Mankato State Teachers College, who has been appointed head of the reference department for the year; and Mr. Hodnefield, the head of the accessions department, has been appointed acting librarian. Dr. Blegen also has a leave of eleven months from September 1 to enable him to accept a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation for research in Norway on the history of Norwegian immigration to the United States; and Mr. Verne E. Chatelain, head of the department of history of the Nebraska State Teachers College at Peru and a graduate student at the university has been appointed acting assistant superintendent. The work of the society undoubtedly is hampered somewhat by these leaves, but it is believed that in the long run they will redound to its advantage.

Mention has already been made of some of the professional activities of members of the staff outside their routine work for the society, but there are others that should be noted, for they all serve to enhance its reputation. Dr. Blegen taught a course in Minnesota history at the summer session of the university, read papers at the meetings of the Mississippi Valley

Historical Association in April and of the National Education Association in July, and edited the third volume of the *Studies and Records* of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. He also represented the society and read a paper at the Sixth International Congress of Historical Sciences at Oslo, and he will utilize his opportunities to discover and acquire for the society important material on the history of the Norwegian element in Minnesota. Dr. Nute, during her vacation, visited several archives and manuscript depositories in the East for personal research and incidentally discovered material of importance for the society. She wrote an article on "The Preservation of Public Records" for *Minnesota Municipalities* and a sketch of Minnesota history for a volume to be published by the national society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, read a paper entitled "Some Conclusions from a Resurvey of the Minnesota State Archives" at the meeting of the American Historical Association, and made trips to Houghton, Michigan, and to Chicago in search of Minnesota material. She is continuing her teaching at Hamline and is giving at present a course on the history of the West. Mr. Babcock, besides working on his thesis, wrote two brief magazine articles and managed the summer convention. Miss Wheelhouse prepared a paper for the convention, which was afterwards published in the society's magazine, and Mr. Lehmann, the newspaper assistant, in several trips visited thirty-three towns in order to search for and examine newspaper files. Mr. Hodnefield represented the society at the midwinter meeting of the American Library Association in Chicago, and Miss Krausnick plans to search for material of Minnesota interest while traveling in Germany and Austria during the coming year. The superintendent continues to teach his usual courses at the university. He wrote an article on "Clarence Walworth Alvord, Historian," with a bibliography of his writings, for the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, the article on Minnesota for the new edition of the *Encyclopedia Brit-*

tanica, and several articles for the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. He is serving as president of the Agricultural History Society, as a consulting editor for *Social Science Abstracts*, and as secretary of the Conference of State Historical Agencies in the Upper Mississippi Valley; and he has charge of the compilation of a bibliography of American travel for the American Historical Association. Three members of the staff have written or are writing articles for the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

In response to a call from the state department of administration and finance a budget was prepared setting forth the requests of the society for appropriations for the next biennium and explaining the needs therefor. The appropriations for each year of the current biennium are \$27,400 for "maintenance," which is used for salaries; \$20,000 for "equipment, travel, and office expense," which includes the purchase of books and the printing and binding of publications; and \$8,000 for "war records" work. In the new budget no further appropriation is requested for war records work and no increase is asked in the equipment, travel, and office expense fund. Increases in the maintenance fund of \$5,400 for the first year and \$5,800 for the second year are asked to enable the society to make ten small increases in salaries, totaling \$970 a year, and to add to the staff a curator of archives at \$2,400 and a head of the reference department in the library at \$2,100. Of the proposed increases in salaries it is stated that they are necessary if the present efficient staff is to be held together, and that they "are amply justified by the increased experience and ability of the individuals and by the relatively low scale of salaries now paid as compared with positions in other institutions calling for similar training and experience."

The need for a curator of archives is set forth as follows:

By the terms of chapter 170 of the laws of 1919 the Society is made the custodian of such non-current "records, files, documents, books, and papers as may be turned over to it from any of the

public offices of the state." Much archival material of value for record as well as for historical purposes has been received, and more should be turned over. The material usually needs cleaning, sorting, and filing before it can be made accessible. With the termination of the War Records work the extensive archival material accumulated by the War Records Commission will be without a custodian. It is desirable, therefore, that a curator of archives be appointed to have charge of all the archival material in the custody of the Society, to investigate and arrange for the transfer of other records, especially such as are not receiving adequate care, and to promote the proper care and preservation of public records generally throughout the state. Many of the states, as, for example, Iowa, maintain separate archives departments costing \$10,000 a year or more, but it is believed that in Minnesota the work can be adequately handled through the Historical Society at a much smaller cost.

In justification of the proposed position of head of the reference department, attention is called to the fact that the use of the library by the public is several times as extensive as it was in 1919.

Nevertheless there has been no increase in the reference staff, which still consists of a single assistant without professional training. As a consequence the librarian has to divert much of her time from important administrative work to waiting upon readers, assistants in other departments have to be called in to help out, and the service to the public is slow and unsatisfactory. During Miss Krausnick's leave, Miss Fawcett is to take over the reference work she has been doing, and it would greatly improve and facilitate the service if the position could be made permanent.

A special appropriation for newspaper stacks is requested for the first year of the biennium, and in justification thereof it is stated that:

The newspaper stacks erected when the building was built are now crowded and additional shelving is necessary for further accessions. It is estimated that stacks to fill the remaining space and take care of the growth of the collection for about six years can be erected at a cost of \$5,000.

The total sum requested for the biennium exceeds the appropriations for the current biennium by only \$200 and the

total for operation is nearly \$5,000 less than the previous appropriations, the decrease being made possible by the completion of the war records work. The budget, which was drawn conservatively, was explained by the superintendent at a hearing before the finance commission. The detailed recommendations of the commission to the legislature are not available as yet, but in the summary budget, which has been published, the recommendations for each year are just \$2,400 under the requests, from which it may be inferred that all requests except that for the position of curator of archives are approved. It is impossible, of course, to predict what the action of the legislature will be.

In the last annual report the hope was expressed "that, as Minnesota grows older, some of her people of wealth and culture will make liberal donations or bequests to aid the Minnesota Historical Society in promoting the scientific study of the past." One such contribution has been made during the year: the will of the late Herschel V. Jones of Minneapolis, who died on May 24, provides for a bequest of twenty-five thousand dollars to the society "for the purchase of books, pamphlets and manuscripts relating to subjects, individuals and events having a bearing upon the history and development of Minnesota." This is the most valuable gift ever made to the society and it is to be hoped that the example set by Mr. Jones will be followed by others. It will not be amiss, therefore, to suggest that one of the pressing needs of the society is a fund that can be used to promote the editing and publication of source materials for the history of Minnesota and the Northwest.

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