

## THE 1929 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The seventy-second annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society, held in 1921, was distinctly a departure from precedent. In that year the society decided to abandon the usual practice of holding only one business session followed by the annual address. Plans were made instead for several sessions and for a dinner. If ever an innovation was justified by results, this one seems to have been, for the annual meeting has developed in the eight years since from an affair more or less routine in character into a full day's program of varied and stimulating conferences and historical papers. Even more important to note is the fact that the sessions are no longer attended by a mere handful of officers and members of the society. Several hundred persons attended the eightieth annual meeting on January 21 and showed a marked interest in the discussion of various matters connected with the history of their state. A fair share of those present came from parts of the state outside the Twin Cities, for some twenty counties were represented as compared with three or four in 1921 — a fortunate development that results in an ever-widening circle of activity. Thus it may be said that the annual meetings of the society have come to contribute much to the process of humanizing Minnesota history.

The unique feature of the 1929 meeting, however, consisted in holding part of the sessions in the city of Minneapolis. Although the charter of the society requires that the business session be conducted in St. Paul, there existed a feeling that Minneapolis deserved some special recognition for the liberal way in which it has always supported state historical work. Then too it was felt that the holding of sessions in two cities would make it possible for more people to attend

one or more of them. It is gratifying indeed to record that this innovation met with even greater success than had been anticipated. Not only did the citizens of Minneapolis cooperate with enthusiasm, but the service provided by the management of the New Nicollet Hotel, where the morning sessions and the luncheon were held, was all that could be wished. About seventy-five people attended the morning session, and over a hundred enjoyed the mental as well as the physical exhilaration that came with the luncheon.

The ninth annual local history conference opened at 10:00 A.M. with Dr. Solon J. Buck, superintendent of the society, acting as chairman, the topic of first consideration being ways and means of financing local history work. Mr. Verne E. Chatelain, acting assistant superintendent of the society, who opened the discussion, presented data concerning methods of financing used in other states. He called attention to the growth in the idea of public support, bringing out the fact that less than twenty-five years ago most historical activity was carried on by private means. Public support, he showed, received its first substantial development in certain western states, notably Wisconsin, but today it is no longer restricted to that area. For example New York, one of the oldest of the states, has now under way a very comprehensive scheme of public financing, although it still relies a great deal upon private support. The choice of the method used, the speaker asserted, will effect vitally the policies and the very nature of the organization itself. Ordinarily the private society will result in a more restricted membership and program, while public financing will stimulate and produce a more comprehensive scheme and will be better adapted to carrying the message of history to all the people. In conclusion Mr. Chatelain cited instances wherein the public method of financing is combined with the idea of private support, "to the mutual advantage of each policy."

The conference was fortunate in having present Mr. William E. Culkin, president of the St. Louis County Histori-

cal Society, who told how his society secured its financial support. This organization, he showed, is the only history group in Minnesota aside from the state society to receive regular public support. The situation in St. Louis County, which prompted the legislature of 1923 to permit the county board to appropriate a maximum annual sum of twenty-five hundred dollars for historical work, is possibly unique, Mr. Culkin admitted, for the size and wealth of the county have no parallel elsewhere in the state. Nevertheless it is the public support accorded the society, despite the fact that it has a private membership of approximately five hundred, which makes possible the maintenance of permanent quarters in the court house and regular office hours. The society has made a practice of continuously collecting and arranging historical materials with the idea of making them always available for public use.

Mr. Culkin was followed by Mr. Burt W. Eaton, president of the Olmsted County Historical Society, who discussed the local history situation in his county, where lack of space for housing collections and inadequate resources greatly hinder the work. These problems, Mr. Eaton pointed out, confront most of the local bodies in the state. For their solution he proposed a legislative measure that would, if passed, permit every county to provide quarters in the court house for a county historical society and to appropriate money for its support, the maximum amount to be allowed in each case to depend upon the population of the county. The proposal suggested by Mr. Eaton came as a result of a committee investigation, of which he acted as chairman, following a discussion in the local history conference of 1928. After some debate a unanimous vote of approval was given to the proposition by those present. It was understood that Mr. Eaton would take steps to bring his proposal before the legislature and that the representatives of local history work in other counties would coöperate with him in an attempt to secure its favorable consideration during the present session.

The remainder of the morning conference was devoted to a consideration of the question "Does Minneapolis or Hennepin County Need an Historical Society?" Miss Gratia Countryman of the Minneapolis Public Library, in opening this part of the discussion, raised the question of the effect of such a society upon the state organization, which already, she pointed out, serves somewhat as a local organization for the Twin Cities. The speaker expressed the opinion that county societies outside the region of Minneapolis and St. Paul, as in the case of St. Louis County, might serve to strengthen the state society, but that the opposite effect might result from an organization such as is proposed. She recognized, however, that there is much historical work in Hennepin County yet to be done and said that she was open-minded in regard to the matter. She expressed the opinion also that the Minneapolis Public Library, which is already collecting local history material, would be more suitable than the court house as a depository for the collections of a county society.

The question of the effect of the proposed society upon the state society having been raised, the chairman gave his opinion, on the basis of his experience with other county societies, that a society in Hennepin County, if properly managed, would supplement the work of the state society and strengthen its position by interesting more people in historical activities. He stated also that Mrs. Charles S. Pillsbury of Minneapolis, who had been asked to speak but had been unable to remain for the discussion, had requested him to say that she was opposed to a county organization and felt that the people of Minneapolis should give all their support for historical work to the state society. The same opinion was expressed by Mrs. Alexander A. Milne of St. Paul.

Mr. Jefferson Jones, vice president of the Minneapolis Journal Printing Company, was then called upon and warmly espoused the idea of a local depot for receiving historical materials. The state organization, he asserted, ought to have

such a place of deposit in each county. Whether the various depositories turn over to the state body the material they get is not so important, provided it is well cared for and remains accessible for borrowing and photostating, said Mr. Jones. The vital thing is to collect and preserve priceless historical materials that are now being carelessly destroyed. Several other speakers emphasized the need of some local unit to cooperate with the state society in saving material that is rapidly being lost, and Mr. Edward C. Gale pointed out that an organization might do valuable work of this sort without engaging in other activities such as the holding of meetings. Feeling that the proposition merited further study, Mr. Gale made a motion, which was carried, that it be referred to a committee to be appointed by the chairman of the conference.

There was also some discussion of the question of the best places for housing local societies, and several speakers expressed the opinion that in some counties the city library would be a better place than the court house. Professor C. A. Duniway, president of the Rice County Historical Society, pointed out that the important thing is not how and where the activity is carried on — for that would vary, he thought, in different communities — but to keep the society going vigorously.

At the luncheon Mr. Frederick G. Ingersoll, president of the society, acted as toastmaster. Mr. Henry A. Bellows, director of Radio Station WCCO, taking for his subject "Minneapolis," suggested the thought that every large city has a distinctive personality — something that makes it different from every other great urban center. He said that, as he visited great cities, they usually left with him some vivid personal impression in the form of a single mental portrait. His portrait of Paris, Mr. Bellows said, was a twilight scene on the left bank of the Seine, "with the silent towers of Notre Dame beautiful and wise and sad" overlooking the bookstalls. For New York the scene was shifted to the corner of Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, where "a motley, heterogeneous

crowd" yielded good-naturedly to authority personified in a burly Irish policeman. But Minneapolis has left in his mind an entirely different sort of picture. It is a canvas showing a street — no particular street — but one "of pleasant, well-kept, unpretentious houses — of homes in the full sense of the word." A cause for this Mr. Bellows found in "industry, in the sense of settled, creative manufacture," contrasted to the restless activity of commerce, which produces "the hotel and apartment house and the delicatessen store." From its beginning, he pointed out, Minneapolis has always been an industrial community of highly skilled workmen. It has lacked on the other hand that huge quantity of untutored labor so characteristic of many American communities. For that reason perhaps the Mill City inhabitants live chiefly in single-family homes or duplexes, and not in apartment houses and flats.

The analysis of St. Paul by the Reverend Frederick M. Eliot of Unity Church, St. Paul, proved to be, as had that of Mr. Bellows, a penetrating interpretation of the basic conditions present in the speaker's community. The Capital City, he showed, must be viewed in an entirely different way from its sister community. The magnificent outlook that one gets from the High Bridge crossing the Mississippi typifies St. Paul for Mr. Eliot. It directs the imagination to the South and to the East. St. Paul is the point of contact for the whole Northwest with Europe and European civilization, said Mr. Eliot. It faces east toward Chicago, New York, Washington, and the Atlantic, while Minneapolis faces the West. Therefore it is not strange, the speaker asserted, that St. Paul should still be the political center of the state, with its two domes representing on the one hand "political liberty," and on the other "spiritual aspiration." Mankind will long depend more upon the civilization of the Atlantic than upon that of the Pacific, concluded Mr. Eliot, and St. Paul, symbolic as it is of commercial and cultural contact with the Old World, will continue to be "imperative for the welfare of this section of the country."

Dr. Guy Stanton Ford, dean of the graduate school of the University of Minnesota, completed the series of luncheon talks with a skillfully drawn picture of Minnesota as a whole. Situated at the crossroads of an inland empire, he said, this region is something more than a spot on the map. It has a significance, a spirit, and a unity. Such things as the railroad, the rivers and highways, the historical society, and the state university have done much to create and preserve this thing we call Minnesota, but the future is a challenge. The old settler is passing and the events of tomorrow will find us either in a position of supremacy or at the foot of the column. This will depend in no small degree, asserted the speaker, upon whether a unified Minnesota sets out to find a constructive program, or is content to let other regions take up the mantle of leadership.

The afternoon session of the annual meeting was held in the auditorium of the Historical Building in St. Paul, with Mr. Ingersoll in the chair. A part of the time was devoted to the reading of the annual report of the superintendent, which will be found elsewhere in this magazine. Memorials were then read in honor of two distinguished members of the society's council who have recently died. Mr. Harold Harris of St. Paul presented the memorial of Gideon S. Ives, a former president of the society; and Mr. Gale read the tribute to Herschel V. Jones, the owner and publisher of the *Minneapolis Journal*. Both memorials appear in this issue of the magazine. The final feature of the afternoon's program was an excellent paper on "Some Colonization Projects of the Northern Pacific Railroad" by Harold E. Peterson of Elkhart, Indiana, which dealt with the part played by this railroad in the settlement of the state. Since this paper will be published in MINNESOTA HISTORY in the near future, no attempt will be made here to summarize it.

The evening program, presented also in the society's auditorium, was a fitting climax to a most profitable and pleasant

meeting of the society. The large audience present plainly showed its appreciation of the brilliance and profundity displayed by Dr. Herbert Heaton, professor of history in the University of Minnesota, in his presentation of the annual address, which was entitled "The Development of New Countries — Some Comparisons." The address appears elsewhere in this issue of the magazine, thus making it possible for those who were not present to enjoy it. A moving picture depicting the development of farm machinery in the Northwest, which was presented through the courtesy of the Northwest Farm Equipment Association, completed the program. Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the society's museum, had arranged for this feature and had also put on display in the museum some interesting special exhibits. An informal reception for members of the society and their friends, at which light refreshments were served by members of the society's staff, concluded the meeting.

VERNE E. CHATELAIN

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ST. PAUL



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