

THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1929¹

An important means of keeping up the morale of the staff of the society, including that of the superintendent, consists of the annual reports prepared by the heads of divisions and departments and the general report that the superintendent is permitted to present at the annual meeting. Most of the time the things that loom largest before us are those that ought to be done but are not being done for lack of time and means. The annual reports, however, give occasion for a survey of what actually has been accomplished during the past year, and we are usually surprised to discover the multitude of our activities and the amount of progress that really has been made. In a well-established historical society, many of the activities are the same year after year, but it is worth while to note the progress that has been made in routine activities and to call attention to new developments and improvements in methods.

The practice of holding two public meetings during the year, the annual meeting in January and the state historical convention in June, has now become well established and was not deviated from in 1929. The annual meeting was marked by an innovation, however, in that the morning session and the luncheon were held not in St. Paul but in Minneapolis. The summer meeting, the eighth in the series, centered at Hutchinson and Litchfield, but was unusually peripatetic, with sessions and tour stops at a variety of places. Accounts of both of these meetings have been published in the society's magazine, but it may be noted here that the interest of the public in them, as manifested by the attendance and by the newspaper publicity that they received, was greater than ever before.

¹ Read at the eighty-first annual meeting of the society on January 13, 1930. *Ed.*

This is but one of a number of indications that the people of Minnesota are becoming conscious of the fact that its history is interesting and important.

The executive council of the society at its April meeting voted to raise the life membership fee from twenty-five to fifty dollars, the dues of sustaining members from five to ten dollars, and those of annual members from two to three dollars, effective July 1. In view of the fact that sustaining and annual members had the expectation of becoming life members after six and twenty annual payments respectively, they were permitted to make such payments in advance at the old rate until July 1, and 54 sustaining and 72 annual members took advantage of the opportunity and became life members. The number of new active members enrolled during the year, 96, is smaller than that for several years past and the total active membership at the end of 1929 — 1,464 — shows a decline of 26 for the year. The loss of members by death during the year was 30, and 99 were dropped for nonpayment of dues, but 7 former members were reinstated. The increase in the dues was undoubtedly responsible for the dropping of a number of members, but the failure to enroll a larger number of new members was a result rather of the fact that the pressure of other work made it impossible to carry on as active a campaign for members during the year as has been done in some past years. During the last quarter of the year, when the membership work was carried on more vigorously, 38 new active members were enrolled, and it seems doubtful that the higher dues will prevent any considerable number of really interested people from joining the society. Certainly they are justified by the increased cost and value of the publications distributed to members.

Besides the 1,464 active members, the society had at the end of the year 8 honorary, 48 corresponding, and 19 institutional members, making a total of 1,539. The addition of

the 181 schools and libraries that subscribe to the society's publications produces a total of 1,720 members and subscribers, which is only 10 less than the corresponding figure a year ago. Plans have been worked out for the appointment of a state-wide committee on membership, with at least one representative in every county, and it is believed that an intensive campaign during the new year will bring in many new members.

The most notable death among the members during the year was that of our venerable and beloved president emeritus, Dr. William W. Folwell. The president has appointed a committee to prepare a statement expressive of the sentiments of the society in this connection, and the report of the committee will be presented at this meeting. A committee of citizens appointed by President Coffman and representing the university, the historical society, and other organizations has arranged for exercises in memory of Dr. Folwell to be held in the auditorium at the University of Minnesota on Thursday, February 20, at 11:00 A.M., and all members of the society will be invited to attend.

Fortunately Dr. Folwell had completed his work on the manuscript for the fourth volume of his history some time before his death, and about a week before the end came he had the satisfaction of knowing that copy had been sent to the printer. About half of the text is now in type, and the remainder will be set up in the near future; but proof reading and the compilation of a consolidated index to the entire work, which is to be included in this volume, will take considerable time, and it will be several months before the volume will be ready for distribution.

The first volume of the two-volume work on *Minnesota in the War with Germany* came from the press just at the close of 1928, and its distribution took place largely in 1929. Numerous reviews of it have appeared during the year and the

critics have found it both scholarly and interesting. The drafting of the second volume was nearly completed on June 30, when the war records division went out of existence. Enough money was reserved from the appropriation for the work of the division to pay for the printing of the volume, and it will be completed and published soon after Dr. Folwell's last volume comes out. Fortunately Miss Appel, one of the authors of the work, remains on the staff in another capacity, and will be available to see the volume through the press.

The four issues of the society's magazine, *MINNESOTA HISTORY*, for 1929 contain fifteen formal articles on such subjects as the development of new countries, the career of a little-known literary figure of the early Northwest, the psychological reactions of Scandinavian immigrants to the New World, the work of a Catholic missionary among the Indians, and a newly discovered pamphlet by a well-known explorer. The articles, reviews, and notes are the work of twenty-seven contributors, including eight from outside the state. It is to be regretted that more members and subscribers do not take advantage of the opportunity to exchange their unbound copies of the magazine for bound and indexed volumes. The publication has now completed its tenth volume and its fifteenth year, and its more than five thousand pages contain much of permanent interest and value. In order to make this material more usable for reference purposes a consolidated index to the ten volumes will be prepared and published in the near future. The stock of some of the early numbers is almost exhausted and those who wish to fill in gaps in their files are advised to act promptly.

The monthly clip sheet for newspapers and the quarterly check list of state publications have been issued regularly, a new edition of the handbook is in course of preparation, and progress has been made on contemplated bibliographical and documentary publications. In this connection attention might be called to the fact that the Mississippi Valley Historical As-

sociation has appointed a commission to raise and administer a publication fund of ten thousand dollars as a memorial to Clarence W. Alvord, a former member of the society's council. The money is to be used as a revolving fund for the publication of source material for the history of the Mississippi Valley, and the project should relieve the state societies of the necessity of publishing segments of material which would be more appropriately issued in a unified form. The authorization by Congress of the publication by the state department of the papers of the territories in the national archives will also bring into print an important body of Minnesota material that would otherwise, presumably, be published by the society. There will still remain, however, in such great collections as the state archives, the papers of Minnesota people, and the newspaper files, ample material for all the documentary volumes that the society will be able to edit and publish.

The number of books acquired by the library — 2,403 — was somewhat less than in previous years, but it includes all the essential current publications in our field and a goodly number of older works. Among the latter may be noted: a rare pamphlet printed in St. Paul in 1858 containing early records of the Presbyterian synod of Minnesota, a photostatic reproduction of a pamphlet by J. Fletcher Williams entitled *History of the Newspaper Press of St. Paul (1871)*, photostatic copies of six exceedingly rare Scandinavian items relating to America, many volumes of American travel written by foreigners, files of a number of missionary publications, and several early files of important Minnesota and South Dakota newspapers. Many of the current historical and biographical publications are so superficial in character that it seems unnecessary to purchase them, especially as they are usually available in other libraries in the Twin Cities; and it is felt that the limited funds of the society can be spent more profitably in acquiring transcripts and photostats of documentary material of importance for Minnesota history. Accessions of this sort

include: additional material from the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions relating to Indian missions, papers on missions in the Indian office in Washington, items from the Selkirk transcripts in the Public Archives of Canada, documents from the French archives relating to early explorers, letters of Bishop Plessis of Quebec concerning early missionary activity in the Red River Valley, and many items of Minnesota interest in files of the *Dubuque Express and Herald* for 1856 and 1857 and of the *American Missionary* from 1846 to 1859.

Outstanding accessions of manuscript material by gift include: World War correspondence and papers of Mr. Allan Firestone and of the Reverend Frank W. Sweet; Civil War letters of Judge Jasper N. Searles and of Mathew Marvin, both of whom served with the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry; papers of William Constans, a pioneer merchant of St. Paul, of Nathan Butler, a pioneer settler and surveyor, of Galen H. Coon,¹ an agent for agricultural machinery at Northfield, of James K. Hosmer, including an extensive autobiography, and of Frederick C. Neumeier, an editor of Stillwater; and additions to the papers of Dr. Folwell, Senator Nelson, N. H. Winchell, and the Reverend Edward D. Neill. Unpublished secondary studies acquired include doctoral dissertations on "Influences and Conditions Affecting the Settlement of Minnesota, 1837-1860," by Sister Eucharista Galvin; "Rise and Progress of Secondary Education in Minnesota," by Professor Hugh Graham; and master's theses on the "History of Swift County," "The Settlement of Clay County," and "The American Fur Company in the Upper Mississippi Valley."

The 444 articles received by the museum in 1929 include costumes, dress accessories, furniture, toys, musical instruments, pioneer tools and utensils, surgical instruments, military uniforms and equipment, coins and currency, a stamp collection, a collection of rosaries, and a granite mortar and

small stone pestle. The largest number of items was received from the family of Dr. Folwell. The picture collection was increased to 38,755 by the addition of 923 items, including portraits of pioneers and prominent people, a collection of pencil sketches of the upper Mississippi region made by Augustus O. Moore in 1862 and 1863, and photographic copies of water color paintings of Indians and scenery in Wisconsin and Minnesota by Jean Baptiste Wengler, an Austrian artist. The lantern slide collection was increased to 745 items by the addition of 114 slides, made mostly from pictures in the society's possession.

The growth of the collections requires constant additions to the equipment for storage and exhibition. Three new wall cases have been purchased for the museum and four old glass wall cases have been modernized with wooden backs. The congestion in the newspaper stacks will be relieved by the construction of additional stacks in the space under the front steps as soon as the state purchasing agent can obtain satisfactory bids for the work. The construction of another level of the bookstack would make possible the elimination of the storage of duplicates on wooden shelves at the bottom of the stack space, and the growth of the library will make it imperative in a few years.

Despite the prolonged illness of one of the cataloguers, the number of books catalogued during the year, although less than that for 1928, exceeded the current additions, exclusive of groups not regularly catalogued, by 775, which indicates that progress is being made on the uncatalogued accumulations. A plan was devised during the year by which many pamphlets of the sort that in past years have been fully catalogued will hereafter be classified and filed in vertical files or in pamphlet boxes and catalogued by groups, and it is believed that this procedure will save considerable time. In the work of renovating the map collection, 2,477 maps were cleaned, pressed, repaired when necessary, sorted, and filed. No maps were

mounted during the year, but those that need such treatment were laid aside and it is expected that this work will be under way again in the near future. A detailed inventory has been made of the duplicate newspaper files in the possession of the society and this together with the checking of regular files in connection with the proposed bibliography of Minnesota newspapers has disclosed the fact that many missing numbers in these files can be supplied from the other sets. Much time has been spent in the sorting and arranging of manuscripts, and the inventory or descriptive list of the manuscript collection has been completed in preliminary form for the personal papers and part of the papers of organizations. The cataloguing of current accessions of manuscripts, pictures, and museum objects is kept up to date and progress is being made on the accumulations.

The demand for books in the reading room by genealogists and general readers was not so great in 1929 as it has been in some years, but there was a notable increase in the utilization of the society's resources by scholars. The fact that writers and advanced students come from a distance and spend weeks or even months in St. Paul in order to have access to the society's collections is an indication of the value of those collections and of the fact that they are serving their purpose. It is worthy of note also that the society's equipment and methods are coming to be looked upon as models by those interested in historical work in other states, some of whom even come to St. Paul to observe the society at work. Among recent visitors of this type were three representatives of the state of Indiana, the secretary of the State Historical Society of Nevada, the curator of manuscripts of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and the curator of the Detroit Historical Museum. Inquiries by mail concerning the work of the society come from institutions in all parts of the Union and are answered as fully as possible.

An important service of the society is that performed by the information bureau, which, under the direction of the assistant superintendent, supplies information on a great variety of historical and allied subjects in response to inquiries, many of which are referred to the society by state officials and others to whom they are originally presented. Copies of the reports prepared in response to such inquiries have been carefully preserved and indexed and frequently the same report can be used several times, but the number of new reports prepared has risen steadily from 55 in 1924 to 153 in 1929. This is very gratifying as another indication of the increasing interest in historical matters; but it means a considerable drain upon the time of the staff, and it has been necessary to reorganize the work so as to distribute it among as many members of the staff as possible.

The number of visitors to the museum during the year was in excess of 33,000, and the number of those who came in classes or special groups — 6,933 — broke all previous records. Two of these groups, consisting largely of high school students and their teachers, were brought to St. Paul by railroad excursions, one from the northeastern part of the state and the other from western Wisconsin, and many others came from outside the Twin Cities. The Minneapolis high schools continue to use visits to the museum and reports thereon as part of the regular work in courses on community life and problems.

Other services to the public include the loan of museum objects for special exhibits, of pictures for reproduction, of lantern slides to illustrate lectures, and of cuts for reprinting; coöperation with the department of agriculture of the university looking toward the establishment of an agricultural museum and with the officers of the American Legion in the promotion of historical work by local posts; talks by members of the staff before clubs and other organizations; the development of plans in coöperation with the state highway department

and other interested agencies for facilitating the marking of historic sites; an exhibit, composed principally of a miniature Indian village, at the state fair; and assistance in the organization of county historical societies. In this last connection mention should be made of the fact that the bill to authorize appropriations by county boards for historical work was finally passed by the legislature, and advantage has already been taken of it in a number of counties.

Changes in the staff, some temporary and some permanent, were unusually numerous during the year. Dr. Blegen, the assistant superintendent, returned from his leave on August 1 and Miss Krausnick, the librarian, came back a month later. Dr. Nute, the curator of manuscripts, and Miss Heilbron, the research assistant, were both on leave for several months during the summer, their positions being filled by Miss Ethel Virtue and Miss Livia Appel respectively. Mr. Holbrook's connection with the society was terminated June 30 by the discontinuance of the war records division, of which he was the head. Mr. Hodnefield resigned as head of the accessions department on September 1, and the position was filled by the appointment of Miss Esther Jerabek. Miss Lois Fawcett, who held the temporary position of head of the reference department during Miss Krausnick's leave, has been reappointed, the position having been made permanent. Miss Wheelhouse, the editorial assistant, was given a year's leave of absence beginning on October 1, and Miss Appel is substituting for her. Mr. Arthur J. Larsen succeeded Mr. Lehman as newspaper assistant on January 15. Miss Anne Blegen returned on September 1 to the position of editorial and office assistant which she had previously held. Miss Esther Johnson was appointed a cataloguer on September 1 in the place of Miss Ingram, resigned. There were also a number of changes in the stenographic and clerical staff. The instability of the staff in 1929 slowed up the work of the society somewhat, but all except one of the regular members

are now on duty, the new appointees have proved their efficiency, and it is believed that the work will go forward expeditiously in 1930. The enthusiasm and loyalty of the members of the staff and especially of the heads of divisions and departments is very remarkable and is an asset of great value to the society.

A number of members of the staff engage in professional or scholarly activities outside their routine duties, and these reflect credit upon the society. During his absence abroad Dr. Blegen made notable progress upon a comprehensive history of Norwegian immigration and returned with a large collection of transcripts and photostats, many of which will ultimately be published. He has resumed his teaching in the university, where he gives a course in the history of Minnesota; and he has recently been reelected managing editor of the publications of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, in which capacity he has already brought out eight publications. Dr. Nute visited various repositories of manuscripts and made some investigations concerning material of Minnesota interest while in Europe during the summer. She has compiled a list of fur-trading posts in the state for publication in *MINNESOTA HISTORY*, and she coöperated with the superintendent in preparing an historical map of the Central Northwest for an atlas of the region that was compiled by the university. She continues her teaching at Hamline University, and is giving at present a course in the history of Minnesota. Mr. Babcock has written a number of articles for newspapers and magazines and has prepared the introduction, notes, and a map to accompany two travel accounts to be published in *MINNESOTA HISTORY*. He attended the conference on mid-western archeology of the National Research Council at St. Louis in May, visited the Hudson's Bay Company museum in Winnipeg during his vacation, and made a number of trips in the state for the promotion of historical

work. Miss Fawcett attended the midwinter meeting of the American Library Association in Chicago. Miss Wheelhouse is devoting her leave of absence to graduate work in history at the university, and Mr. Larsen is giving part of his time to similar work. The superintendent continues his teaching at the university. He attended meetings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the Agricultural History Society in the spring and of the American Historical Association in December. He supervised for the public archives commission of the American Historical Association, with the assistance of Dr. Nute, a partial reinventory of the state archives of Minnesota, and he continues to direct the compilation of a bibliography of travel for the same association. As chairman of the Alvord memorial commission previously referred to, he is directing the raising of the fund and planning its projected publications. Several members of the staff have written articles for the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

The biennial budget drawn up before the last session of the legislature and submitted to the state department of administration and finance asked for increases in the maintenance fund to enable the society to make ten small increases in salaries and to add to the staff a curator of archives and a head of the reference department in the library. No increase was asked for in the travel, equipment, and office expense fund, and no further appropriation was requested for war records work, but a request was included for a special appropriation of \$5,000 for the completion of the newspaper stacks. The department of administration, in its budget submitted to the legislature, approved the society's budget, with a reduction of \$2,400 a year from the amount requested for maintenance. The legislature accepted the recommendation of the department and appropriated \$30,400 for the first year, and \$30,800 for the second year of the biennium, for maintenance; \$20,000 each year for equipment, travel, and office expenses; and

\$5,000 for newspaper stacks, making a total for the biennium of \$106,200. The increase in the maintenance fund for the biennium amounts to \$6,400, but this and the appropriation for stacks are more than offset by the dropping of the war records work, for which \$16,000 was appropriated for the previous biennium. As a consequence, the total appropriations for 1929-31 are \$4,600 less than those for 1927-29.

From the fact that the amount that the department of administration reduced the request for maintenance, \$2,400, coincided with the proposed salary for a curator of archives, it was assumed that the department would approve the other proposals in the society's budget. The budget for the current fiscal year was drawn up on that basis, therefore, but when the requests for salary increases were submitted to the department of administration, it refused to authorize about half of them. As a consequence, although the money had been appropriated, the society was not allowed to make increases in salaries which its executive committee believed to be desirable. One of the members of the staff whose salary increases were refused resigned his position; the others agreed to remain at the old salary for the time being, but some of them certainly will resign in the course of a year or two if their salaries cannot be increased. An attempt was made to get a small increase for one of them on January 1 but it was unsuccessful.

An act of the last legislature that may have important results for the society is the one providing for the erection of a state office building. Early in the summer the members of the state department of administration, who are also members of the building commission, called for a statement of the needs of the society for further space and also made a personal inspection of the building. It was pointed out to them that the society needs and could make effective use of all that part of the building not occupied by it at present. No formal action has been taken so far as is known, but it is believed

that the new building, if, when, and wherever it is built, will contain quarters for the department of education, and that part, if not all, of the space now occupied by that department in the Historical Building, will then be available for the use of the society.

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MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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