

## THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1930<sup>1</sup>

An increasing sense of historical perspective is evident in the point of view of the people of Minnesota. Like the younger Burke they have been taunted with the charge of youth, but the inexorable march of time is removing the foundations from underneath this charge. It is about a hundred and twelve years since American soldiers built the fort that became the nucleus for white settlement in this region; it is almost eighty-two years since this society was founded; and Minnesotans look back more than four score years upon their state and territory as an organized entity. The genuine "old-timers" have passed from the stage; the second generation is invested with the dignity of elders in the state community; and the third and fourth generations stand forth as the leaders and doers of the day; while a fifth generation serves faint but unmistakable notice of its mundane existence. This takes into account merely the span from the day of the pioneer to the present. Into the consciousness of the state, however, a longer perspective than this has been impressed by having attention dramatically called to the time that has elapsed since the earliest explorers of the French régime first viewed the Minnesota scene. In the year just past the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the Falls of St. Anthony has been appropriately celebrated; and the people are awake to the fact that a commonwealth with historical backgrounds that merge with the era of Louis XIV can meet with complacency the heinous charge of youth. Consciousness of the lengthening perspective of our history is perhaps at the bottom

<sup>1</sup> In the preparation of this report, which was read at the eighty-second annual meeting of the society on January 19, 1931, the writer drew freely upon the reports of the heads of divisions and especially upon that of the assistant superintendent.

of the increasing attention and interest that the people of Minnesota are devoting to their history and to the organization of their historical work. One county after another organizes a local historical society; the movement for the preservation and marking of historic sites gains momentum; local historical museums appear; a comprehensive four-volume history of Minnesota is completed; the gathering up of historical records by state and local societies proceeds at an increased pace; and in the schools and in the press large attention is given to the facts of the past and their significance. Not a turning of the ways, perhaps, but a broadening of the path is before us, as the society, cognizant of this growing sense of perspective, grapples with its tasks and opportunities, seeking in a variety of ways to make history serve the people.

The annual meeting of the society, held in January, 1930, included the usual sessions — morning, luncheon, afternoon, and evening. The local history conference and the luncheon, both held at the Lowry Hotel in St. Paul, were well attended. Evidence of the society's cordial sympathy with the exploitation of Minnesota's social history was the inclusion, in the afternoon program, of a discussion of the problem of working out a medical history of the state. The annual address, presented at the evening session, was an eloquent apotheosis of Lincoln by Dr. Shambaugh of the State Historical Society of Iowa and was much appreciated by the large audience.

The summer meeting, the ninth in its series, was held in June and was to an unusual degree peripatetic. Its purpose was to exploit the history of south central Minnesota and it included stops and sessions at Rochester, Owatonna, Clark's Grove, Albert Lea, Blue Earth, and Fairmont. The touring party numbered about seventy-five. Sessions along the way were well attended and the whole tour was adequately reported in the press. Speakers included the president of a great medical foundation, a world-famous surgeon, a graduate student of the university, an agricultural leader, two college

professors, a judge, several pioneers, and various members of the society's staff. Among the features of the meeting that should stand out in a general review are the excellent local exhibits that were displayed, particularly at Fairmont; the emphasis upon the critical point of view that marked some of the talks by local history leaders; the preliminary organization of one county historical society; and the stress placed in the programs upon social and economic history.

The active membership campaign carried on during the year with the assistance of a state-wide committee, of which Mr. Frederick G. Ingersoll is chairman, together with the publication of a volume of Dr. Folwell's *History*, has been mainly responsible for the enrollment of 151 new active members as compared with 96 in 1929. Deaths of active members numbered 39 and 111 were dropped from the rolls, but 16 who had been dropped in previous years were reinstated. The net gain for the year, therefore, is 17. The total membership at the end of the year was 1,557, including 8 honorary, 43 corresponding (a decrease of 5), 25 institutional (an increase of 6), and 1,481 active members. The number of schools and libraries that subscribe to the society's publications was raised from 181 to 192, so that the total of members and subscribers was 1,749, an increase of 29 over the previous year. The society has more than held its own in membership during a year in which depression and stringency have marked general economic conditions. It has held its own also in the face of the recent increase in dues. The number of members dropped for nonpayment of dues is large, but the dropping process, though drastic, is effective in maintaining a vital membership.

The most notable event in the annals of the society for the year was the publication of the fourth or last volume of Dr. Folwell's *History of Minnesota*. Such comments as have been received indicate that the volume is proving fully as interesting and valuable as the earlier ones. The usefulness of the set as a work of reference is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of a

consolidated index in this volume. The stock of the first volume of the history was exhausted before the last appeared, but about sixty copies were accumulated by purchase from former members and others who had not received the later volumes. The demand for complete sets soon exhausted this supply, and the indications are that it may be desirable, in time, to reprint the entire work, perhaps as a popular edition in two volumes with the footnotes and some of the appendixes omitted.

With the completion of this notable work it was possible to take up again the work on the second volume of the war history, which was not completed when the war records division went out of existence in 1929. It is expected that this volume will be sent to the printer in a few months, after which several volumes of documentary materials and bibliographical compilations will be rounded into shape for publication. While the collections of original sources, which will probably be the main publications of the society from now on, will be of value primarily to students and writers, volumes made up of material selected on the basis of general interest will be issued from time to time.

The four issues of the society's magazine, *MINNESOTA HISTORY*, for 1930 make up a volume of 505 pages and contain articles representing a wide range of historical interest. Social and economic history is well represented with articles on the fur trade, milling, steamboating, and roads and trails; the significant Hennepin anniversary is reflected in Mr. Edward C. Gale's delightful article "On the Hennepin Trail," and in the urbane address by Prince Albert de Ligne, the Belgian ambassador; and considerable space is devoted to the discussion of historical work, local and state. The articles, reviews, and notes are the work of thirty-two contributors, five more than in 1929, and many of them are by scholars of national reputation. The consolidated index to the first ten volumes of the magazine, including over five thousand pages in fifty-six

numbers issued during fifteen years, is approaching completion and will be published in a few months.

The quarterly check list of state publications and the monthly clip sheet for newspapers were issued regularly. These are not distributed as a rule to members but any of them who so desire may have their names added to the mailing lists. When the one-hundredth number of the clip sheet was distributed in March an inquiry was directed to editors as to the value of this service to them. The appreciative replies received indicate that the publication is serving its purpose and should be continued. A revised roll of members was issued in May and copy was prepared for a new edition of the general handbook of the society, which it is hoped may appear in the near future.

Toward the close of 1929 the Ramsey County War History Commission published a volume entitled *St. Paul and Ramsey County in the War of 1917-1918*, edited by Franklin F. Holbrook, and containing 588 pages divided about equally between a readable narrative and a roster. Lacking facilities for distribution, the commission turned the greater part of the edition over to the society together with a fund to cover the cost of distribution. About 250 copies were sent to libraries throughout the country with which the society has exchange relations and those Minnesota schools and libraries that are on the society's roll of subscribers. Under the agreement between the society and the commission, "Gold Star mothers" are entitled to copies free of charge on application; but, despite considerable publicity, only fifty-eight copies have been so disposed of. Copies are also available for sale at \$1.50 each, but only a few have been purchased. Mention might be made here also of the fact that the reminiscences of Dr. Folwell, which he wrote or dictated during the last years of his life, are being edited under the direction of the superintendent for publication by the University of Minnesota Press.

The number of books, including newspaper volumes and accessioned pamphlets added to the library in 1930 was

2,579—174 more than in 1929, and the total estimated strength of the library is now 171,000. The acquisitions for the year include three rare books purchased from the income of the Herschel V. Jones fund: the first issue of the first edition of Lahontan's *Nouveau Voyage*, published at The Hague in 1703; the Utrecht, 1698, edition of Hennepin's *Nouveau Voyage*; and the London, 1699, edition of Hennepin's *New Discovery*. Another notable purchase is *Adventures in Americana*, the elaborate two-volume catalogue, with facsimile title-pages, of selections from the library of Herschel V. Jones, which was published in 1928. The most important addition to the newspaper collection, aside from current issues, consists of extensive files of three Norwegian newspapers published in Chicago, Decorah, Iowa, and Madison, Wisconsin, which range from 1868 to 1911. These were received on exchange from Luther College at Decorah.

Outstanding accessions of manuscript material by gift include the original diary of Alexander Ramsey for 1864; a copy of the official roll of the Chippewa Indians of the White Earth Reservation compiled in 1920; papers of the Reverend Stephen R. Riggs, the missionary to the Sioux; papers of Clarence W. Alvord, the historian, including transcripts of valuable historical documents; transcripts of extracts from the diaries of Curtis H. Pettit of Minneapolis for 1855 and 1856; and extensive additions to the papers of William W. Folwell. Large bodies of archives of the governor, secretary of state, attorney-general, and adjutant general, and a vast quantity of records of district land offices that had accumulated at the United States land office at Cass Lake have been deposited in the custody of the society during the year. Reproductions of manuscript material acquired by purchase include photostatic copies or transcripts of documents relating to exploration, Indian missions, and the fur trade in Minnesota and the Northwest in collections in Paris, Quebec, Boston, and Washington.

Gifts of costumes and accessories, objects illustrative of

domestic life, ethnological and archeological specimens, and pictures have been more numerous than usual, but the most notable accession to the museum during the year is a collection of about a hundred and fifty objects illustrative of life among the Chippewa Indians, acquired by purchase. This includes a full-sized birch-bark tepee, various objects actually used by the Indians, and numerous models made for the collection by the Indians at Grand Portage under the direction of Miss Frances Densmore of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

The outstanding addition to equipment during the year is the newspaper stack installed in the space under the front steps, which provides shelving for about three thousand volumes. When this was finished a complete rearrangement of the newspaper files was undertaken, involving the moving, and incidentally the cleaning, of every one of the sixteen thousand volumes. The need for additional space in the main stacks, especially in those portions devoted to archives and manuscripts, made it necessary to reinstall in the shipping room the old shelving that had been taken down to make room for the war records commission after the last level of the book-stack was completed. To these shelves were moved certain files of little-used documents of other states, thus making space in the stacks for more important material. No new museum cases were purchased during the year, but the last nine of the old glass wall cases were modernized with wooden backs. The purchase of a portable vacuum cleaner, with attachments, made possible the cleaning, for the first time in many years, of the entire library, and with a minimum of labor and inconvenience.

The catalogue department devoted considerable time to special projects which do not show in the statistics, such as the complete cataloguing of all the articles in *MINNESOTA HISTORY* and its predecessor, the *MINNESOTA HISTORY BULLETIN*, and the arranging, inventorying and temporary cataloguing of the periodical files in the Swedish Historical Society collection on permanent deposit. Nevertheless the number of volumes cata-

logged, 2,869, exceeds that of 1929 by 330 and exceeds the current additions, exclusive of groups not regularly catalogued, by 891. It is evident, therefore, that some progress is being made on the uncatalogued accumulations.

Special efforts were made to catch up on the binding and rebinding of books in the main library with the result that about twice as many books were put through the process as in previous years. The binding of current newspapers is kept up to date, about four hundred and fifty volumes a year; but several hundred newspaper volumes need rebinding, and this is a difficult and expensive process because of the poor quality of the paper and the narrowness of the margins. Some experimental work was done, however, and it is hoped that the task may be completed in 1931. Little progress was made in the work of sorting, cleaning, repairing, and mounting maps during the year, but the work that has been done in previous years has made the bulk of the collection fairly accessible and usable.

In the manuscript division several large collections of personal papers, including the Folwell Papers, were sorted and arranged, the new archival deposits were arranged and inventoried, most of the volumes of federal census schedules were rebound, and progress was made in inventorying the state census schedules and the Knute Nelson Papers. The descriptive list of collections of personal papers, which was completed in preliminary form in 1929, is now being revised and prepared for publication.

Numerous special exhibits and new installations, including the new Chippewa collection, have been made in the museum. The pressing need of additional space for the hanging of framed pictures has been met in part by utilizing the walls of the newspaper room for twelve pictures of newspaper men, and plans are being considered for hanging pictures in the corridors on the first and second floors of the building.

The number of books served to readers in the main library, 29,219, was an increase of twenty per cent over the number

for 1929, though less than that for several previous years. The use of newspapers, however, broke all previous records by a wide margin. The number of readers, exclusive of members of the staff, rose from 851 in 1929 to 1,243 in 1930, the number of bound volumes consulted by them, from 1,619 to 2,133, and the number of current issues, from 3,500 to 16,000. The tremendous increase in the use of current issues is due in part to the fact that several readers have adopted the practice of examining large numbers of papers at frequent intervals for political or commercial purposes.

The widespread appreciation of the value of the society's collections is seen in the fact that they were used during the year by people from twenty-four states and two foreign countries. Several of these came to St. Paul specifically for the purpose of using the collections and spent weeks here pursuing their investigations. About forty per cent of the readers in the main reading room are genealogists and the next largest group is that of college students, but state officials, newspaper men, clergymen, writers, teachers, and club women are represented in considerable numbers.

The demands upon the society for information to be furnished by mail was not quite so great as in 1929, but a total of 204 inquiries were answered by the information bureau and 109 new reports were added to the indexed information file. In this connection it is of interest to note some of the fruits of this work. An important book recently published, entitled *John Marsh, Pioneer*, by Dr. George D. Lyman of San Francisco, is based in part on material supplied by the bureau, and the same is true of a series of historical sketches published during the year in one of the Minneapolis dailies. Suggestions and bibliographies were supplied for another newspaper series and informal suggestions are constantly being made to the increasing number of writers of local histories, historical fiction, and historical material for radio broadcasting.

The number of visitors to the museum in 1930, estimated

at twenty-seven thousand, is about six thousand less than for 1929 — a reflection, presumably of the general decrease in the number of tourists visiting the city; but the attendance of students in classes and groups, 6,268, was considerably greater than in any preceding year in which the legislature was not in session. This increase was due in part to three railroad excursions that brought in large groups from the country.

The most notable of the special activities of the year was the setting up under the auspices of the society of the Minnesota Historical Survey, the present purpose of which is the preparation of a report on historic sites, monuments, and markers throughout the state. The executive committee of the survey, appointed by the president, met on July 16, designated Mr. Babcock as director, arranged for the selection of an advisory committee of seventy, and discussed plans for operation. The advisory committee is now being made up and the responses to invitations to serve on it indicate widespread interest in and approval of the project. County historical societies will be enlisted in the work where they exist and the survey will be pushed intensively in a few counties at first in order that the experience gained there may be available in working in other counties later on. Considerable publicity has been given to the project in the press, with the result that much information has been volunteered, especially with reference to the location of the Red River trails. The information that will be assembled will undoubtedly be of great service to the many groups and individuals interested in marking projects and the activities involved will certainly serve to stimulate interest in state and local history.

Closely related to this survey but distinct from it is the project inaugurated in 1929 for the erection of markers on state highways calling attention to historic sites in the vicinity. This is a coöperative project in which the society supplies the inscriptions and the state highway department furnishes and erects the markers. Inscriptions for forty-one markers for

sites in thirty counties had been supplied by the end of 1930 and most of the markers had been erected. A demand is arising for similar markers on roads that are not state highways, and it is probable that the society will be called upon to supply inscriptions for such markers to be erected by local organizations.

Other special activities that can only be mentioned in passing include: assistance in organizing and developing the work of county historical societies; advice with reference to the installation of museums; an exhibit at the state fair centering around the theme of the farmer in Minnesota history; some fifty talks or papers by members of the staff, mostly before local clubs or societies but including three high school commencement addresses, an address to sixteen hundred citizen soldiers at Fort Snelling, and papers before four national or regional learned societies; contributions by members of the staff to various publications; the work of the superintendent as chairman of the joint committee on materials for research of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council, as chairman of the Alvord memorial commission of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, and as director of the compilation of a bibliography of American travel and description for the American Historical Association; the services of the assistant superintendent as editor of the publications of the Norwegian-American Historical Association; field trips of the curator of manuscripts to various points in the state and to Milwaukee and Quebec in search of Minnesota material; and the services of the curator of the museum as president of the Mid-west Museums Conference and member of the executive committee of the central section of the American Anthropological Association.

The society joined with the University of Minnesota in extending an invitation to the American Historical Association to hold its 1931 meeting in Minneapolis. The invitation was accepted and the meeting will take place from December 28

to 30 inclusive. Professor Shippee, a member of the society's council, will be chairman of the program committee and the superintendent has been named executive secretary of the committee on local arrangements. It is hoped that the conference of historical societies, which is a regular feature of the meeting of the association, and perhaps some other sectional meetings may be held in the society's building.

The state appropriations for the current biennium amounted to \$61,200 for maintenance, \$40,000 for equipment, travel and office expenses, and \$5,000 for newspaper stacks. The proposed budget for 1931-33, submitted to the department of administration and finance, included \$6,800 additional for maintenance, to provide for a few salary adjustments and a much needed curator of archives, and \$2,000 additional, for equipment, travel, and office expenses. This fund, which covers book purchases, binding, publication, and numerous incidental expenses, has not been increased for eight years. A special appropriation of \$8,500 is also requested for the equipment of another level in the main book stack. Only four of the eight levels for which provision was made were installed when the building was erected. One more was installed with an appropriation made six years ago, but the growth of the library since then has resulted in serious congestion. A new level of stacks will remedy this situation and take care of the normal increase for six or eight years. The department of administration and finance, in its budget, has reduced the maintenance item by \$4,800 — the amount asked for the salary of a curator of archives for the biennium — but has approved the remainder of the requests. No prediction is ventured as to what action the legislature will take on them.

The private income of the society available for expenditure — mostly income from invested funds and dues of sustaining and annual members — amounts to about twelve thousand dollars a year, and furnishes an essential supplement to the state appropriations. It can hardly be expected that these ap-

propriations will be so increased in the near future as to enable the society to expand its operations to any considerable extent, but it is not too much to hope that people of means and discernment will more and more realize that the society offers a unique opportunity for the promotion of culture and of research, for enabling the present and future generations to understand better the society in which they live through knowing more of its backgrounds. The Jones bequest of twenty-five thousand dollars, the income from which became available in 1930, and the bequest of a thousand dollars in the will of the late Frederic A. Fogg, a former president of the society who died during the year, are deeply appreciated, not only for their immediate value but as indications of future possibilities. The great development of charitable, educational, religious, and scientific endowments and foundations in recent years demonstrates that many American men of wealth feel an obligation to use their means for the welfare of society. Perhaps more of them will in the future recognize that an adequate and accurate knowledge of the past is an essential foundation for social progress.

SOLON J. BUCK

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ST. PAUL



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).