

THE 1931 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

About a hundred members and friends of the Minnesota Historical Society attended the opening session of its eighty-second annual meeting, held on Monday, January 19. This took the form of a luncheon at the St. Paul Athletic Club. Mr. Burt W. Eaton of Rochester, president of the Olmsted County Historical Society, served as toastmaster and introduced as the first speaker the Honorable J. Adam Bede of Duluth, who entertained the audience with "Some Personal Recollections of Minnesota Politics." Mr. Bede treated his subject with characteristic humor, keeping his hearers in an uproar with anecdotes told with a keen sense of the ludicrous; with droll tales of casual, yet very revealing, happenings in the political history of the state; and with witty accounts of some of the remarkable men who have figured in that history. Among the scenes from the mauve decade that he deftly pictured was a "four-inning debate" between Charles A. Towne and himself on the silver question, in which Towne laid the fall of Rome to the demonetization of silver, to which Mr. Bede replied that he knew that the Roman soldiers had a hard time — he was in fact acquainted with some of them — but that he was more concerned about American soldiers whose pensions would be cut in two if the "silverites" triumphed.

Mr. Eaton next introduced Dr. Solon J. Buck, superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, who read some "Selections from the Reminiscences of William Watts Folwell." It was evident from these selections that Dr. Folwell, whose *History of Minnesota* constitutes so rich a legacy to his state, has left in his "Reminiscences" a supplement that will deepen the value of his *History* and will record as no one but himself could the unique personality of its author. The "Remi-

niscences" include accounts of Dr. Folwell's boyhood in New York state; of his education at Hobart College and his trip abroad just before the Civil War; of his services in the war; of his experiments in business; of his work as a teacher in Ohio; and of his career in Minnesota as university president, professor, historian, and humanitarian. In the last chapter Dr. Folwell tells how he came to write his *History of Minnesota*. The selections read by Dr. Buck made it evident that the "Reminiscences," soon to be published under his editorship by the University of Minnesota Press, will be a book of extraordinary interest.

The Honorable Henry N. Benson, attorney-general, presided at the eleventh annual conference on local history work in Minnesota, which was opened at 3:00 P.M. in the auditorium of the Historical Building, with about fifty persons, representing some fifteen counties, in attendance. In his introductory remarks Mr. Benson told of the impetus that has been given to historical interest in Nicollet County by the organization of a local historical society. One feature of the recent celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of St. Peter was the assembling of a large collection of historical objects, many of which have become the permanent possession of the county society.

Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, assistant superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, then reviewed "The Year's Progress in Local Historical Work." Quoting Woodrow Wilson's remark that "local history is the ultimate substance of national history," he suggested that the very localization of history seems to emphasize its universality, for community history, he said, has to do with what people have believed, what they have made of themselves and of the resources under their control, how they have earned their living, how they have acted in ordinary times and in crises, how they have amused themselves, worked, lived, died, with due attention to the whys and wherefores. These are matters of universal interest and

significance. In the exploration of such questions, he asserted, one also attains a new sense of the relativity of time, for as one draws away from the pioneers chronologically, one draws near them in understanding.

A year ago, said Mr. Blegen, there were sixteen county historical societies in Minnesota, whereas now there are twenty-one. The new societies are in Steele, Brown, Rock, and Sherburne counties, while in Pipestone County an old association, reorganized on a new basis, has been officially recognized as the county's historical society. In Hennepin County an historical committee, rather than a society, sponsors and directs local history activity and correlates it with the work of the state society. Taking old and new, including two municipal societies, there are no less than twenty-four organizations in the state devoted to local history work, while in some fifteen other counties there are signs of an awareness of the need of local history organization.

An outstanding development of the year, the speaker said, was the development of local history museums. He mentioned particularly Rice, Nicollet, McLeod, Brown, Cottonwood, Kandiyohi, Otter Tail, Swift, and Pipestone counties in this connection. During the year the societies have made excellent progress in the marking of historic sites, in the collection of manuscript and printed historical materials, in arranging for program meetings and special celebrations, in publication, and in the promotion of local and state historical interest in the schools. The speaker conceded that the emphasis upon the collection of old things was proper, but he expressed doubt that the county societies were giving sufficient attention to the collection of current materials, such as newspapers, pamphlets, folders, handbills, and programs. He reminded the audience of the wisdom of Alexander Ramsey, who said in 1849, "Let us save that which is interesting in the fleeting registers of the day, and which in the years to come will be esteemed rich mines for the historian. Early commenced, easily accom-

plished." Touching on the teaching of local and state history, Mr. Blegen suggested that county societies might attempt to make outlines and materials available for the use of teachers; and apropos of meetings he said that the state society would be glad to lend slides and pertinent explanatory material to local societies for program use.

The general discussion that followed the reading of this paper was opened by Mr. J. N. Jacobson of Hills, who told of the enthusiasm with which the new local society in Rock County had been launched. On its board, he said, are representatives from all the townships comprising the county. Mr. Milton Edstrom of Minneapolis urged local societies to affiliate with the state society through becoming institutional members. Miss Amy A. Lewis, formerly librarian of the Fergus Falls Public Library, gave a brief account of the materials assembled by the Otter Tail County society and placed on display in the library. Dr. Buck explained the possibilities of financial aid for local societies from the counties under a state law of 1929. Mr. William H. Pay of Mankato announced that a room in the public library building of Mankato has been set aside for the use of the Blue Earth County Historical Society.

The chairman then took up a series of printed questions that had been submitted by various county historical societies for consideration at the conference. The first related to two plots of ground owned by the Otter Tail County Historical Society, which has erected an historic marker on each. Are these plots subject to taxation? Can they be deeded to the state and made state parks? Replying to these questions Mr. Benson explained that both public ownership and public use are necessary to confer tax exemption; in the cases referred to, the purpose is doubtless public, but the plots are not owned by the public hence they are not exempt. That the plots could be deeded to the state and accepted by it without specific legislative authority the attorney-general considered doubtful.

Mr. Stanley Anonsen of Benson, secretary of the Swift

County Historical Society, was called upon to answer the following question: "Is it advisable to enlist the assistance of the county-seat teacher in the work of gathering and classifying historical materials?" In Swift County, he said, the county commissioners appropriated the sum of four hundred dollars to finance the distribution of Mr. Anonsen's *History of Swift County*, which recently was published by the local society. Mr. Anonsen expressed the belief that local societies ought to enlist the active coöperation of teachers with training in historical work. He himself had started a collection of clippings of local historical interest and had worked out a plan for classifying them. The problem, he thought, was to insure the carrying on of such enterprises, and he suggested the advisability of county societies appropriating an amount of money adequate for paying someone for the necessary part-time work that would be involved.

Dr. Buck, commenting on Mr. Anonsen's suggestions, asserted that a local historical society would not be a success until it was someone's definite purpose and business to make it so. A high-school teacher or a local librarian interested in the work of a county society might well be engaged to carry on the work for a moderate compensation. Close coöperation with the local library he considered advisable. Indexing, rather than clipping, might prove the proper solution for some societies of the newspaper problem.

Questions were raised both as to meetings and as to dues. Dr. Blegen explained the varying practices of the county societies in the matter of meetings and programs; and a number of speakers touched upon the question of dues, Mr. Pay, for example, explaining that in Blue Earth County there is an annual membership fee of one dollar and a life membership fee of ten dollars and that an annual member, after ten payments, is enrolled as a life member. Judge Julius E. Haycraft of Fairmont described the situation in Martin County, where the local society has only one kind of membership—a life

membership at five dollars. He stressed the necessity of a selected membership, but pointed out that the classes of people interested in history change continually and that there will always be a stream of new members.

Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the museum for the Minnesota Historical Society, then made a few remarks concerning the highway marker project now being carried on by the state highway department and the state historical society. He asked for suggestions for markers and inscriptions and added that during the past year some forty markers were erected along trunk highways.

The last speaker of the conference was Senator Victor E. Lawson of Willmar, who told of the Kandiyohi County Old Settlers' Association, which once raised twenty-five thousand dollars to finance the publication of a county history and which has recently erected a log cabin on the county fair grounds at a cost of five thousand dollars. Commenting on the value of historical contacts Mr. Lawson told how interest was added to a visit that he made to West Virginia by exploring the history of a colony of Morgantown people who removed to Kandiyohi County, Minnesota, in pioneer times.

The last session of the meeting was held at 8:00 P.M. in the auditorium of the Historical Building, with the president, Dean Guy Stanton Ford of the University of Minnesota, in the chair. The audience numbered about a hundred and seventy-five. After the presentation of the reports of the treasurer and of the superintendent, the annual address was delivered by Dr. John D. Hicks, dean of the college of arts and sciences and professor of American history in the University of Nebraska. For many years Dr. Hicks has carried on his researches in the history of the farmers' movements in the eighties and nineties. He now took as his subject "The Persistence of Populism," contending that most of the reforms that the Populists demanded in the nineties won out in the end, though they were rejected in their own day. Since the address is pub-

lished elsewhere in this number, it is unnecessary to itemize the argument. A scholarly discussion of an important subject, clearly the fruit of extended studies in a chosen field, the address also had the charm of freshness and interest, and those who heard Dr. Hicks will look forward with eagerness to the appearance of his book on the Populist revolt.

The address by Dr. Hicks was followed by an exhibition of motion pictures from the Grand Portage region taken by Dr. Buck last August with a camera belonging to the Minnesota Historical Society. In presenting the pictures Dr. Buck explained that he desired to illustrate one type of historical recording that the society is now equipped to do. Another type of photographic record was presented by Mr. Babcock in a series of still films with scenes from the state historical tour and convention of 1929.

After the conclusion of the program the audience adjourned to the museum rooms, where light refreshments were served by members of the society's staff. It should be added that, as usual, many visitors took advantage of the opportunity afforded by the annual meeting to visit the museum, the library, the manuscript division, and other departments of the society. In fact, it was with the purpose of encouraging such visits that the usual morning session was omitted.



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