

THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1931¹

Though the Minnesota Historical Society has not been unaffected by the ubiquitous depression, its record for 1931 is on the whole one of steady progress. In seeking to make history serve Minnesota, it has emphasized the collection and preservation of materials, the accessibility of its collections to users, and the promotion of historical understanding and appreciation on the part of the people. These are fundamentals that must be maintained if the society is to meet the challenge of this day of Minnesota's maturity. That the commonwealth has indeed come of age is evidenced not only by the complexity of the economic and social problems that confront it but also by the increasing concern that its people are betraying in the matter of understanding its past. As the perspective widens, both the significance and the fascination of the historical background deepen; and from this situation emerges an unmistakable and inviting challenge to leadership.

Two successful and well-attended meetings were held during the year. The annual meeting, in January, included a luncheon, a local history conference, and an evening session; and its varied program reached a climax in the annual address, a skillful interpretation of the Populist revolt by the leading authority on that subject, Dr. John D. Hicks of the University of Nebraska. If the annual meeting impinged upon current economic and political problems, the tenth annual historical tour, held in August, harked back to the days when the fur-trader was lord of the wilderness. Its purpose was to exploit the history of the North Shore, and it included stops and sessions at Duluth, Two Harbors,

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Grand Marais, and Grand Portage, around which cluster traditions of the fur empire of the eighteenth century. Nearly a thousand people, including many Canadians, were present at the final session, held jointly with the Cook County Historical Society in celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the arrival at Grand Portage of the explorer, La Vérendrye. When it is noted that among the speakers of the convention were such well-known scholars as Dr. Louise Phelps Kellogg, Professor Orin G. Libby, and Mr. Lawrence J. Burpee, and when it is remembered that visitors and local people joined in exploiting the history of Minnesota in a variety of ways, one is justified in repeating the phrase of a journalist who characterized the tour as a "peripatetic seminar in history." The activities of this seminar were vigorously reported in the press of the state; thus it became an extension course; and doubtless many who did not take part in the tour felt the stimulus that it gave to historical interest.

The society has about held its own in membership during 1931, notwithstanding the recent increase in dues and the impact of economic stringency. The membership at the end of the year was 1,551 as compared with 1,557 a year ago. This total includes 8 honorary, 42 corresponding (a decrease of 1), 27 institutional (an increase of 2), and 1,474 active members (a decrease of 7). The number of schools and libraries that subscribe to the society's publications was raised from 192 to 196, so that the total of members and subscribers was 1,747, two under the figure of last year. Eighty new active members were enrolled in 1931 and 16 who had been dropped in previous years were reinstated. These gains were more than offset, however, by the deaths of 39 active members and by the dropping of 75 from the rolls for nonpayment of dues. Not a few of those whose memberships have been cancelled intend to rejoin when, if ever, the economic pendulum swings upward. Meanwhile, there are unquestionably hundreds of people

in the communities of Minnesota who would gladly join the society if the advantages of membership were brought to their attention. Coöperation in reaching these people is much to be desired.

Among the thirty-nine members who died during the year was an honored and useful member of the society's executive council, Jed L. Washburn of Duluth. His place in the council has been filled by the election of Mr. Charles E. Adams, also of Duluth.

A large task was completed in 1931 by the publication of a consolidated index to the first ten volumes of the society's quarterly magazine. This volume of nearly two hundred pages should prove a boon to students, librarians, editors, and general readers who have occasion to make use of the mass of articles, documents, and notes that have gone into the magazine from 1915 to 1929. With the index is printed a classified list of 158 articles and documents published in the first ten volumes. Copies of the volume have been supplied to subscribing libraries and schools and are available to members on request. The classified list is also available as a reprint.

The four issues of the society's magazine, MINNESOTA HISTORY, for 1931 comprise a volume of 458 pages, to which an index will be added. The subject matter of the articles ranges from the French régime and the story of Grand Portage to Red River Valley pioneering and populism; and the materials published represent the work of thirty-nine authors, many of them scholars of national reputation. In March the magazine received a new dress—a type-designed cover in black on green, with directness and lack of ornamentation as the leading ideas.

The monthly *Minnesota Historical News* and the quarterly check list of state publications were issued regularly throughout the year. The mailing list of the *News*, which completed its tenth year in December, was increased by about fifty newspapers in 1931. A "Brief Sketch of Min-

nesota History," prepared by the curator of manuscripts, was supplied for the 1931 *Legislative Manual* and five hundred reprints of it were run off for the society.

Two considerable research and editorial projects were advanced to the edge of publication during the year and several others are under way. The writing, annotating, and editing of volume 2 of *Minnesota in the War with Germany* were virtually completed and the volume will be sent to the press in the near future. Much editorial work has been done by the assistant editor on the diary of Frank B. Mayer, an artist who visited the Minnesota frontier in 1851. Illustrated with a number of Mayer's own sketches, this document is expected to make an attractive and interesting little volume. The publication of such contemporary historical records may be considered one of the basic tasks of a state historical society. Out of the vast mass of sources that the society possesses in the field of missionary activities among the Minnesota Indians, the curator of manuscripts is bringing together and editing a group of documents for another volume of primary material. Under the supervision of Dr. Buck considerable progress was made during the summer on the bibliography of Minnesota newspapers and inventory of files, a joint project of the society and the graduate school of the University of Minnesota.

The number of books, including newspaper volumes and accessioned pamphlets, added to the library in 1931 was 2,889—310 more than in 1930. Of this number, gifts made up sixty-one per cent, purchased items represented thirty-three per cent; and the remaining six per cent came in as exchanges from other institutions. The accessions bring the estimated strength of the library up to 173,700. The acquisitions for the year include several rare books and pamphlets purchased from the income of the Herschel V. Jones fund. One of these is a copy of the French edition of Governor Ramsey's message to the first territorial

legislature in 1849. Among the important additions to the newspaper collection, aside from current issues, is a file of the *Irish Standard* of Minneapolis, extending from 1885 to 1915, presented by Mrs. J. D. O'Brien, the widow of the editor. Other noteworthy accessions include photostats of four numbers of the *Western Farm and Village Advocate*, published at New York in 1852 by the town-site company that promoted the settlement of Winona; and files of a number of important church and missionary publications.

Accessions of manuscript material by gift include a diary kept by Dr. Folwell during his travels abroad just before the Civil War; the business records of a fur-trader; a large body of lumber records; the account books of a frontier merchant; the memoirs of a pioneer woman; the recollections of an Indian fighter; the records of an Indian agent; the papers of a noted geologist; and thirteen college theses, most of which were prepared for the master's degree. Special mention should be made of a very important collection of letters and papers of Bishop Henry B. Whipple, throwing new light on governmental Indian policy, placed with the society by the bishop's son, General Charles Whipple of Los Angeles; and of the Edward Sundell Papers, received as a permanent deposit for the Swedish Historical Society. Notable additions by reproduction or purchase include photostats of twenty-five letters written by Dr. Folwell to Andrew D. White; photostats of the Ramsey County portion of the original schedules of the census of 1857; transcripts of some forty engagements of voyageurs to the Minnesota region in the French period; forty-eight items from the correspondence of Alexander Ramsey and his wife during the period from 1845 to 1867; additional calendars of northwest material in the war department and the bureau of Indian affairs; additional transcripts from the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; copies of the missionary papers of James

Evans, the organizer of Wesleyan missions among the Indians of the boundary area; and a transcript of a diary kept by Albert J. Dickson in 1871 on a journey through southern Minnesota.

More than twenty-two hundred items, not including pictures and negatives, were added as gifts to the society's museum collection during the year, as compared with 810 in 1930 and 444 in 1929. These greatly enrich the collections of costumes and accessories, of objects illustrative of domestic life, of ethnological and archeological specimens, and of military objects. Perhaps the outstanding gift of the year is the extensive Philippine collection, presented by General Charles McC. Reeve, the former commander of the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. General Reeve personally assumed the expense of \$950 for six special cases to house this remarkable collection. Another very notable accession is the Gilbert L. Wilson Collection of Hidatsa and Mandan materials, received from Mrs. Wilson, a gift which enormously enlarges and enriches the society's Indian life collections. Yet other noteworthy gifts include more than seven hundred objects from Miss Mary Folwell; a valuable military collection from members of the families of the late Lieutenant Charles A. Clark, Major Harold M. Clark, and Captain Charles P. Clark; an oil portrait of Giacomo C. Beltrami, presented by the Christopher Columbus Memorial Association as part of the ceremonies connected with the dedication of the Columbus monument; and a group of pictures of Lake Minnetonka steamboats assembled by the late Randolph Edgar and presented in his memory by his father, Mr. William C. Edgar of Minneapolis. An unusual gift is that of about fourteen hundred negatives from the old Sweet Studios of Minneapolis, presented by Mrs. George P. Douglas for the collection assembled in the name of the Minnesota Society of Colonial Dames. A group of more than eight hundred pictures of Mississippi River steamboats and scenes was added by purchase. The picture

collection as a whole, with the 2,329 additions made in 1931, now numbers 42,050 items, about evenly divided between portraits and non-portraits.

The work of classifying, cataloguing, and otherwise caring for the collections is making satisfactory progress. Incoming material is cared for promptly after its receipt and attention is being given to the improvement of the condition and accessibility of older material. The total number of items catalogued for the library was slightly less than last year, 2,749 as compared with 2,869, but it is to be noted that certain projects, such as the cataloguing and re-cataloguing of the collection of books in the Indian languages and of a group of railway pamphlets, involved extensive bibliographical research. The work of inventorying and arranging the incomplete periodical files of the Swedish Historical Society was completed. The biographical index, to which 950 cards have been added during the year under the direction of the head of the reference department, has been removed from the public catalogue and installed in a separate cabinet. The library has been handicapped in its work by lack of adequate space and is greatly in need of an additional level of bookstacks, soon to be built. The manuscript division has advanced the preparation of an inventory of the society's personal collections, a project that will result in a publication of a type sadly lacking for American historical collections. Two new wall cases, in addition to the six for the Reeve exhibit, were installed in the museum. During the year twenty-one special exhibits were arranged, and in addition exhibits were lent for special purposes to business firms, libraries, and other institutions. The entire building received a much-needed cleaning and redecorating during the summer.

The year reveals an upward trend in the use of the society's materials. Thus the main library registered 4,714 readers as compared with 3,986 in 1930; and the number of books used, 30,359, represented a gain of more than a

thousand over last year. Bound newspaper volumes to the number of 2,893 were examined by 1,239 readers; and the number of current newspaper issues consulted was 28,000 as compared with 16,000 last year and 3,500 the year before. Though redecorating necessitated the closing of the museum for three weeks during the summer, the number of visitors for the year, 27,550, exceeded that of last year by a few hundreds. As an illustration of the educational possibilities of the museum, it should be noted that the visitors included 227 school classes, comprising 6,552 teachers and students. Manuscripts were used by 454 readers as compared with 373 in 1930 and 354 in 1929. Statistics reveal widespread appreciation of the society's collections, but they do not tell the whole story as to the significance of their use. One person may do work of greater importance to the world than that of a hundred others. It is interesting to know that scholars representing some twenty states and two foreign countries are included in the statistics; and that college teachers, graduate students, local history workers, business men, physicians, lawyers, journalists, clergymen, club women, and genealogists are represented among those who made use of the society's treasures. To this list should be added a poet-historian, for Mr. Carl Sandburg found among the collections several original Lincoln letters and a file of a rare and valuable Civil War periodical that he desired to examine.

The "Information Bureau" has functioned with vigor throughout the year. The number of reports sent out in response to inquiries was 261 as compared with 204 in 1930. The inquiries came from Minnesota, fifteen other states, and Canada, and touched such diverse topics as Bryan material in the Donnelly Papers, the Red River oxcart, early mail service, the good roads movement, and the history of winter wheat growing in Minnesota.

The society has continued to give assistance in organizing and developing the work of county historical societies;

and it is noteworthy that three new societies have come into existence, bringing the total to twenty-four, while in some six other counties there are stirrings in the direction of organization. Minnesota is evidently moving toward a time when every county will have its local historical organization and its local collections.

During the year twenty-two inscriptions have been supplied to the highway department for markers, making a total of sixty-three, distributed in forty counties. Each marker, the erection of which is undertaken by the highway department, calls attention to historic sites and events relating to the vicinity where it is placed. With the state of Virginia, Minnesota seems to be pioneering in this field of historic marking; but there are signs that the movement will spread to other states. Progress on the Minnesota Historical Survey, launched last year, has been slow, but some noteworthy results have been achieved in the mapping of the Red River trails.

For a number of years the society has given aid and encouragement to teachers who have used Minnesota materials in grade- and high-school history instruction. During the past year eighty-one inquiries from teachers were answered as compared with sixty-four a year ago; and the superintendent was responsible for a syllabus of Minnesota history that was published by the University of Minnesota Press.

Other special activities that can only be mentioned include two exhibits at the state fair, one depicting the evolution of transportation in Minnesota, and the other a century of costume; more than fifty talks and papers by members of the staff, chiefly before local clubs and societies, but including papers read before the Illinois Historical Society and the American Historical Association, a talk to some two thousand citizen soldiers at Fort Snelling, a radio speech on the work of the society, and illustrated lectures at the University of Minnesota and the Minneapolis Insti-

tute of Arts; various field trips in search of historical materials or to participate in local and regional conferences; attendance of two members at the meeting of the American Library Association in New Haven; contributions by staff members to the *Dictionary of American Biography*, *Social Science Abstracts*, and a number of historical and other magazines; and work on committees and commissions of various regional and national associations. Special mention should be made of a volume entitled *The Voyageur* by Dr. Nute, which was brought out by an eastern publishing house last fall. It richly deserves the glowing reviews that it is receiving, for it is a scholarly work, representing patient research in little-known sources, and it is written with buoyancy and charm. Another book recently produced by a staff member is a study of *Norwegian Migration to America* by the superintendent; and a third book, edited by Dr. Buck, the former superintendent, is announced for early publication by the University of Minnesota Press. The interest of the last-mentioned work for members of the society may be suggested by noting its title: *William Watts Folwell: The Autobiography and Letters of a Pioneer of Culture*. The newspaper librarian, Mr. Larsen, completed during the year a master's thesis in the field of Minnesota history and is continuing his studies for the doctor's degree. He also published in the *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* an important article in the field of the history of northwestern transportation. These and other activities may be taken as evidence of a high professional spirit on the part of the staff.

Minnesota was honored in December by the privilege of playing host to the American Historical Association and allied organizations, which held their annual meetings in Minneapolis. The interest of the members of the Minnesota Historical Society in this national conference on history was displayed in many ways. They supported the work of the committee on local arrangements—of which

Mr. Edward C. Gale was chairman, Mr. Lawrence D. Steefel, vice chairman, and Mr. Ernest S. Osgood, secretary—through advance registrations, and the fees that they paid were sufficient to meet the not inconsiderable expenses of the committee. Professor Lester B. Shippee of the society's executive council served as chairman of the program committee for the American Historical Association; and Dean Guy S. Ford gave an address at one session and presided over the Conference of Historical Societies, which was held in St. Paul, in the auditorium of the Historical Building. Several members of the staff and of the society read papers or participated in discussions at sessions; and one of the happy features of the meeting was the presence of Dr. Buck, who presided over two sessions and participated in several others.

In the budget presented to the state for the biennium 1931-33 a few increases were asked, including \$3,300 a year in the maintenance fund, of which it was hoped to allot \$2,500 for a curator of archives. Such a position ultimately will have to be created in order to meet the increasingly serious problem of administering the noncurrent archives turned over to the society by the various state departments. The legislature, confronted with an urgent need for economy in a period of depression, restricted the regular appropriations to the amounts established by the previous legislature, \$30,800 for salaries for each year of the biennium and \$20,000 for general expenses. It recognized the imperative need of constructing an additional level of bookstacks in the library, however, and appropriated \$8,500 for this purpose. The addition of this sixth level will be made in the near future and will relieve the serious congestion that now obtains in the library. Meanwhile, the society is bulging out at other points, especially in the museum and the manuscript division, where every nook and cranny is crowded. The completion of the state office building, which will include quarters for the depart-

ment of education, will make it possible for the society to meet the problem of space and to care for its needs of expansion.

Miss Clara M. Penfield, after a year's leave of absence, resumed her work as cataloguer on July 1, and Miss Leone Ingram, who served in her absence, accepted a position as cataloguer in the public school library of Hibbing. Mr. Donald E. Van Koughnet, who holds the degree of master of arts from the University of Minnesota and has taken advanced graduate work at Harvard University, was appointed research and general assistant and assumed his duties on September 1.

After nearly seventeen years of service as superintendent and secretary of the society, Dr. Buck resigned to accept a threefold position in Pittsburgh, taking up his work there on September 1 as director of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society and of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey and as professor of history in the University of Pittsburgh. A detailed statement of some of his achievements in the period from 1914 to 1931, when he guided the progress of the society, has already appeared in the quarterly magazine. Here I desire simply to pay a whole-hearted tribute to the wisdom and vigor of his leadership. A master of detail, he was able to see the woods as well as the trees; and he guided this institution along lines of expansion, effective service to the public, and vigorous activity in all departments, steadfastly insisting upon the high standards of professional competence that he himself exemplified. His régime marked indeed a re-founding of the society that has placed it among the leading institutions of its kind in the United States. In taking over the responsibilities of the position that Dr. Buck has held these many years, I do so with a sense of deep gratitude to him for the foundations that he laid and for the training and friendship that he has so generously given me, and with a firm belief that the state has need of such a

society as this. To make history serve the state and its people as effectively as possible in this day of the mature commonwealth is the ideal that I want the society to follow, remembering that Minnesota is more than land and more than people; that it is both, bound together by history and common achievement, one in the intimate fellowship of American commonwealths.

THEODORE C. BLEGEN

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL



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