

## THE 1932 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The eighty-third annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society, held on Monday, January 11, opened with a luncheon at the St. Paul Athletic Club, which was attended by about a hundred and twenty members and friends of the society. Its president, Dean Guy Stanton Ford of the University of Minnesota, presided and introduced as the first speaker Mr. Dudley S. Brainard of the St. Cloud State Teachers College, who presented a paper on "Nininger—A Boom Town of the Fifties." Since Mr. Brainard's paper will appear in a future number of the magazine, it is only necessary to note here that the story of the meteoric rise of this town has a special interest, for Nininger attracted to Minnesota as a founding father Ignatius Donnelly, the picturesque third-party organizer, who for a period of half a century was active in the political life of the state. At the conclusion of the paper Dean Ford introduced to the audience Donnelly's widow, Mrs. Henry L. Woltman of St. Paul.

The second speaker was Mr. Edward C. Gale of Minneapolis, a member of the society's executive council, whose subject was "Schoolcraft and Lake Itasca." Mr. Gale presented evidence, recently discovered, that appears to cast doubt upon the traditional theory of the Latin derivation of "Itasca." In particular he called attention to the discovery by Mr. Irving H. Hart of a statement by Schoolcraft that indicates a possible Indian derivation of the word. He then showed that the problem is further complicated by the finding in the archives of the Minnesota Historical Society of an unpublished paper that suggests a possible Sioux derivation. The mystery surrounding the origin of "Itasca" seems destined to continue. Possibly the centennial

anniversary next summer of the discovery of the source of the Mississippi will stimulate interest in this problem. In any case, Mr. Gale concluded, Schoolcraft was the first to apply the name "Itasca" — whatever its derivation.

Dean Ford next introduced Mrs. F. W. Wittich of Minneapolis, the state budget commissioner, who spoke on "Marking Political Progress for Minnesota." The creation of Minnesota Territory, "nine prosperous healthy territorial years," and the emergence of statehood were the early steps in the political development of the commonwealth. Among the subsequent developments that she sketched as important steps in political progress were the adoption of a fiscal policy relating to the federal land grants that has proved highly profitable to the state, improvements in the election machinery, the extension of the franchise, and the administrative reorganization act of 1925. It was the belief of the speaker that "bold legislative experiments" will carry the state out of the present economic "down curve" as in times past they have helped Minnesota to meet similar crises.

The twelfth annual conference on local history work in Minnesota convened at 3:00 P.M. in the auditorium of the Historical Building, with Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, superintendent of the society, presiding. About sixty-five persons, from seventeen counties, attended this session. In his introductory remarks Dr. Blegen pointed out that the conference is annually called to enable local history workers "to consider problems of common interest."

A survey of "The Year's Progress in Local Historical Work" was then presented by Mr. Donald E. Van Koughnet, research and general assistant on the society's staff, who first observed that pressing problems of international importance have resulted in an increasing emphasis upon the examination of local backgrounds. He then turned to the growth of local history organization during 1931 and called attention to the establishment of three new societies,

in Dodge, Jackson, and Kanabec counties. With old and new societies there are now twenty-seven local historical organizations in Minnesota, including two municipal societies and one historical committee. In six other counties some activity looking toward the organization of local societies took place during the year.

“Museums for the preservation of objects of historical value,” Mr. Van Koughnet said, “have been, and continue to be, one of the most prominent aspects of organized local history projects.” In connection with the La Vérendrye celebration at Grand Portage last August, sponsored jointly by the Cook County Historical Society and the Minnesota Historical Society, an old cabin was converted into an historical museum. The Goodhue County and Hutchinson societies also opened museums. The preservation and marking of historic sites is almost equal in importance to the interest shown in the establishment of museums, the speaker asserted. An outstanding recent activity in this field was the construction of a replica of the old Grand Portage dock, one of the special features of the La Vérendrye celebration.

Local historical societies are gradually entering the field of historical publication, Mr. Van Koughnet said. The initiative that a number of local societies have taken in the preservation of the files of their county newspapers is an indication of the growing emphasis that is being placed upon the collection of current historical materials, he said. Touching on the teaching of state and local history in the schools, he pointed out that the local societies were showing an increasing appreciation of their opportunities in this field. He called particular attention to the experiment conducted in the Kerkhoven Public School by Mr. Stanley H. Anonsen, secretary of the Swift County Historical Society, an account of which appears *ante*, 12:169-171. In addition to this project, essay contests were sponsored by the Goodhue and Otter Tail county societies.

At the conclusion of this paper the chairman introduced Mr. Carl L. Weicht, editor of the *Northfield News*, who gave the opening talk on "Local Historians and the Newspaper," the subject selected for special discussion at the conference. Since Mr. Weicht's paper is published elsewhere in this number of the magazine, it is sufficient to note here that his remarks were grouped around the newspaper as a source of historical data, the value of historical articles and features to the newspaper, and the relationship between the local historian and the newspaper in achieving a common objective. Before opening the conference to a general discussion, Dr. Blegen raised the question of the extent to which newspaper men turn up original historical material, and then queried whether there was any "coöperation with the historical societies in connection with such finds."

Mr. Win V. Working, editor of the *Southern Minnesotan*, spoke first in the general discussion, dealing particularly with the publication of local history articles as part of the reportorial routine of the newspaper, and laying special stress upon the need of accuracy in the reporting of such articles. At the conclusion of this talk the chairman pointed out the necessity of distinguishing between the different types of historical materials and articles. Referring to reminiscences and recollections, which usually contain errors, he said that he favored publishing such material with the errors. It is the business of the historian to sift such material, when he makes use of it, by every type of criticism at his disposal.

Mr. Roy W. Swanson of the *St. Paul Dispatch*, who spoke next, emphasized the historical value of newspaper obituaries. These, he said, "give hints of what Dr. Schafer calls 'primary facts,' now considered so necessary for the complete understanding of historical forces." Mr. Victor E. Lawson, publisher of the *Willmar Tribune*, continued the discussion by stressing the importance of local biography, which he regards as "the basis of all history." He

pointed out the importance of making historical writing as accurate as possible, and then described the methods that he had used in Kandiyohi County to stimulate interest in the gathering and preservation of historical materials. With respect to the last point he said that "a newspaper man who wants to make the best use of his material in time to come must keep a half dozen or more files" of his paper on hand.

Mr. Arthur J. Larsen, head of the newspaper department of the state historical society's library, then sketched the work of this society in the preservation of Minnesota's newspapers. The origin of its collection, now numbering some sixteen thousand bound volumes, the speaker said, was in the recommendation of Governor Ramsey that newspaper files be preserved. Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the society's museum, emphasized the contribution that newspapers could make by the development of pictorial materials for historical purposes. "All have opportunities to accumulate pictures of the community and region, probably brought in for publication, and much of that material," he said, "might be preserved by the establishment of picture files in the newspaper office, transferred to the local historical society, to the library, or to the Minnesota Historical Society." In this connection Mr. Lawson stated that his paper kept a scrapbook of picture prints.

The possibility of the formation of a Douglas County historical society by 1933 was indicated by Mr. Constant Larson of Alexandria. Mrs. Amos Warner of Minneapolis urged that biographers give greater attention to the genealogist's need of specific information. The newspaper point of view in the presentation of news was set forth by Mr. Merle Potter of the *Minneapolis Journal*, who said that accuracy and popularization were indispensable requirements for every piece of news. The discussion of the conference was brought to a close by Professor Clyde A. Duniway of Northfield, who emphasized the importance of

historical-mindedness for newspaper men. "This," he said, "means having a sense of the value of recording the interesting lives even of average persons, and endeavoring to be accurate."

From the Cook County Historical Society Dr. Blegen accepted a La Vérendrye medal, which was presented to the Minnesota Historical Society through the courtesy of Mr. Charles Stees of St. Paul. Mr. Henry I. Cohen, president of the Crow Wing County Historical Society, presented two mounted photographs, one showing a logging cart used in northern Minnesota about 1880 and now in the museum of the Crow Wing County society. This cart, each wheel of which is thirty-five inches in diameter and is constructed of two solid pieces of six-inch oak, was found submerged in Half Moon Lake, about eighteen miles from Brainerd. The other photograph shows the new Crow Wing County Courthouse at Brainerd, in which are located the rooms of the Crow Wing County Historical Society. In connection with the local history conference an exhibit of the activities of the county historical societies was displayed in three table cases of the museum.

The last session of the annual meeting convened at 8:00 P.M. in the auditorium of the Historical Building, with Dean Ford in the chair. The evening session was attended by about a hundred and seventy-five persons. The treasurer and the superintendent of the society read their annual reports, and Mr. Frederick G. Ingersoll of St. Paul presented the following resolutions, which were unanimously adopted:

WHEREAS, General Charles McCormick Reeve of Minnetonka Beach, and Pasadena, California, who commanded the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, in the Philippine Islands during the Spanish-American War, has generously presented his entire Philippine collection to the society, a collection built up over a period of thirty years, and

WHEREAS, This splendid collection is of great value from the intrinsic as well as from the historical and ethnological standpoints, and

WHEREAS, General Reeve in addition has given the sum of \$950 to be expended for the museum cases to house the collection, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, That the Minnesota Historical Society at this, its annual meeting on January 11, 1932, most sincerely thanks General Reeve for his generosity, and directs that copies of these resolutions be sent to him and spread upon the minutes of this meeting.

The chairman then introduced Mr. John G. Williams of Duluth, who read a memorial sketch of the late Jed L. Washburn of the same city, who served as a member of the society's executive council from 1924 to 1931.

After the conclusion of Mr. Williams' sketch, which is published elsewhere in this number of the magazine, Dean Ford introduced Mr. Alfred L. Burt, professor of history in the University of Minnesota, who gave the annual address on the subject of "Our Dynamic Society." Mr. Burt presented a thoughtful interpretation of the development of American society from the period of its first contact with the frontier to that of the complex problems of the present day. He asserted that "though peopled from Europe America has developed a dynamic society, while that of the Old World has been relatively static." He found the explanation of the difference not in the crossing of the Atlantic but in the crossing of the American continent. Perhaps the greatest result of the westward movement, he suggested, was the establishment of a democracy intrinsically different from any known in Europe. With the passing of the influence of the frontier and the rise of an industrial order, however, democracy in America is being transformed into something like that of Europe. Mr. Burt's address appears as the leading article in this issue of MINNESOTA HISTORY. After its conclusion the audience witnessed "Wolfe and Montcalm," a Chronicles of America photoplay. This was followed by an informal reception in the museum rooms, where members of the society's staff served refreshments.

DONALD E. VAN KOUGHNET

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ST. PAUL



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