

THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1932¹

Certain fundamental purposes underlie the work of this society, giving it significance in the life of the state. These are the collection and preservation of the records of Minnesota and its people, a state-wide fostering of interest in the past, the promotion of knowledge and understanding of Minnesota's development and its part in the history of the nation, and competent service in administering the society's collections and in meeting the countless demands that here come to a focus. Why are such objectives essential to a civilized community? Because they aim at an understanding of the common life in its perspective of time and space, with the past always touching the fleeting line of the present. Important in good times, such understanding is doubly so when times are bad, for it breeds steadiness and wisdom. From Alexander Ramsey's day in 1849 to the present, through prosperity and depression, Minnesota has steadfastly supported the purposes that this society represents. This institution has been sustained by the confidence of the Minnesota people and by their belief in its value to Minnesota citizenship. The record of what the society has done in 1932 may be taken as a pledge of continued faithful service.

Two meetings, in both of which excellent attendance was matched by programs of good quality, were held during the year. The eighty-third annual meeting, in January, included a luncheon, a local history conference, and an evening session, concluding with a broad-visioned appraisal by Professor A. L. Burt of the development of American society. In mid-July the society held its eleventh annual tour

¹Read on January 16, 1933, at the eighty-fourth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society. *Ed.*

and state historical convention, with sessions at Alexandria, Fergus Falls, Moorhead, and Itasca State Park. The tour reached its climax in a celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of Lake Itasca by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. In a natural amphitheater on the shores of this pine-fringed lake, twenty-five hundred people viewed an elaborate centennial pageant. The regular program sessions of the tour, though less spectacular than the pageant, maintained a high level of interest. The diversity and range of the papers and talks may be indicated by noting that their subjects included the history of Douglas County, the Red River trails, homestead operations in the sixties, the Latter Day Saints in western Minnesota, pioneer society in the Red River Valley, the Minnesota lumberjack, the discovery of Lake Itasca, and the rôle of the frontier in American life. The summer pilgrimages are becoming, as a newspaper observed, "an accepted feature of the cultural life of the state." The painstaking planning and work that they involve bring ample rewards in the broadening of popular interest in Minnesota history.

Nothing can illustrate better the vitality of the society than the fact that, in a period when many institutions as a consequence of the depression have suffered devastating losses in membership, it has substantially held its own. The active membership is today 1,473, a decrease of only one in the past year. Two honorary and two corresponding members died during the year, leaving the totals for these classes respectively six and forty. The twenty-eight institutional members represent a gain of one. The number of schools and libraries that subscribe to the society's publications dropped from 196 to 192. The grand total of members and subscribers is 1,739, only eight under the figures of last year. That such a result can be reported is due to the circumstance that 94 new active members were enrolled in 1932. This notable gain was offset, however, by the deaths of 36 active members and by the dropping of

59 from the rolls for non-payment of dues. As in 1931, when 75 memberships were cancelled, many of those compelled to withdraw intend to rejoin when and if the economic situation improves. It is clear that the society has an interested and alert membership. It is equally clear that throughout Minnesota there are large numbers of people who might join the society if the matter of membership were put before them. One way of forwarding the cause of history in Minnesota is for members to coöperate in reaching these people.

Last summer the society published the first volume of a series of *Narratives and Documents*. This was a book entitled *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier in 1851: The Diary and Sketches of Frank Blackwell Mayer*, edited by Bertha L. Heilbron, the society's assistant editor. Printed attractively, though inexpensively, and illustrated with nearly fifty of Mayer's own sketches, the book has met with an unusually friendly reception from readers and critics. It was made the subject of a radio talk in Ohio, appreciative notices in the *New York Times*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, and the *Cincinnati Times-Star*, several articles in Minnesota newspapers, and reviews in numerous historical magazines. "Both in its editorial presentation and in its attractive external form," according to a reviewer in the *Canadian Historical Review*, "this book is a model of its kind." As a basic document of Minnesota in the days of foundation-building, it appropriately introduces the new series.

It is a satisfaction to be able to report that the society has completed a large and long-continued task by bringing out the second volume of *Minnesota in the War with Germany*, by Franklin F. Holbrook and Livia Appel, edited by Solon J. Buck. The ten chapters of this book deal with the civilian activities and reactions of Minnesota in the World War, forming a necessary supplement to volume 1, in which the military side is presented. After a general analysis

of the ways in which the war affected the people of the state, the new volume tells of defense measures, public opinion, the Red Cross, the welfare agencies, food and conservation, the fuel problem, finance, and industry, closing with an account of the ending of the war. A comprehensive index to both volumes is included. The distribution of the new volume will be effected in 1933.

The four issues of MINNESOTA HISTORY which have appeared during the year contain contributions by thirty-five authors, many of them widely known historians and writers. Among the twenty formal articles are not a few that contribute to the understanding of Minnesota's social and economic history, such as Mr. Burt's notable address on "Our Dynamic Society" and studies of lumbering, of a boom town of the fifties, and of a pioneer Czech schoolmaster in the state. Improved in its appearance, the magazine is a compendium of information about the history of the state and historical activity throughout Minnesota. Numerous evidences point to widespread appreciation of its usefulness to the state. That its prestige is growing is indicated by the fact that it now receives a great variety of unsolicited material, much of it of high quality. During one week three articles were submitted and a short time later three came in a single day.

The quarterly *Check List of Minnesota Public Documents* has been issued regularly, a service of importance to libraries and state officials. Another minor publication is the monthly *Minnesota Historical News*, carrying brief articles of historical interest to the press of the state.

The publication policy of the society necessarily must be modest and economical, with emphasis upon lasting quality and utility to the state. Though it has published only ten special volumes in the last twenty years, these include works, such as the four volumes of Dr. Folwell's *History of Minnesota*, that have left deep imprints upon the consciousness of the people of the state. At any given time

the society has under way various projects, planned in the spirit suggested, looking toward future publication. Thus at present editorial work is in progress on a volume of letters and documents relating to missionary activities among the Minnesota Indians; on a series of travel narratives from the fifties and sixties; on a collection of editorials and other writings by the pioneer Minnesota editor, James Madison Goodhue; on a collection of letters written from 1858 to 1865 by the militant St. Cloud editor and anti-slavery crusader, Jane Grey Swisshelm; and on a bibliography and inventory of Minnesota newspapers. With its wealth of manuscript and printed materials to draw upon, the society has an obligation to the public to make available documentary materials that will shed light upon the forces that have gone into the making of the commonwealth. Thus it may contribute to a better understanding of Minnesota.

The year was marked by one of the most notable gifts in the history of the society, the monumental Civil War collection of the late Judge Ell Torrance of Minneapolis, presented by Mrs. Torrance and her children. The collection includes about three thousand pamphlets and two thousand bound volumes and is supplemented by a large group of manuscripts pertaining to Judge Torrance's career and by more than a hundred photographs. Since a report of this collection has already been published in the magazine, it is necessary here only to add that this gift, especially through its pamphlet material, notably enlarges the facilities of the society for furthering research in the Civil War period. The number of books added to the library in 1932, including newspaper volumes and accessioned pamphlets but exclusive of the Torrance collection, was 2,531. Of this number, gifts made up sixty-one per cent; purchased items, thirty per cent; and the exchanges from other institutions, nine per cent. The accessions bring the estimated strength of the library up to 176,160. Some interesting additions

were a first edition of Hennepin's *Descriptione de la Louisiane*, published at Paris in 1683; a German edition of Carver's *Travels*, published in 1780; a copy of Porter's *Spirit of the Times* for 1856, a magazine to which Henry H. Sibley was a contributor under the pen name of "Hal a Dacotah"; several issues of the *Northern Herald* of Little Falls for 1857; and a file of *Folkebladet*, an important Norwegian newspaper of Minneapolis, from 1887 to 1893. It may not be amiss to add that regularly the society is receiving and filing more than eleven hundred periodicals and 526 daily and weekly newspapers.

Among numerous gifts of manuscripts may be mentioned, in addition to the Torrance group, a large collection of the papers of a great river magnate, Commodore William F. Davidson; the account book of Captain William B. Dodd, one of the founders of St. Peter, and the diary of his wife; the memoirs of a pioneer Minnesota merchant; the autobiography of a Hollander who had important interests in Minnesota in the eighties; notable additions to the papers of the late James A. Tawney; and a copy of the autobiography of Judge Henry J. Grannis of Duluth. For some time the society has been conducting a quiet campaign for church records, and notable additions were made in this field in 1932, including seven volumes of the archives of the diocese of the Protestant Episcopal church in Minnesota as well as many of the printed Episcopal diocesan journals.

Newly acquired photostats of interest for the study of Radisson include those of two French manuscript narratives by the explorer for journeys made in 1682-83 and 1684, presented by Mr. Edward C. Gale, who secured them from the British Museum; and of the much discussed English narrative by Radisson of his early western "voyages" as preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, secured through the courtesy of Mr. Louis W. Hill. The year has been rich in accessions of photostats, among which may also be mentioned a very important early western newspaper,

the *Missouri Gazette* of St. Louis, for the period from 1808 to 1818; certain portions of the Minnesota census for 1857; and numerous documents in the archives of the Indian Office at Washington. Original manuscripts purchased include thirty-six letters written from 1921 to 1923 by the senior Charles A. Lindbergh; and a diary kept by Samuel Putnam in 1856 and 1857 in western Minnesota. Typewritten transcripts have been made of more than thirty letters in the George Johnston Papers at Sault Ste. Marie; of a diary kept by Dr. Douglas Houghton on the Schoolcraft expedition of 1832; of a considerable number of letters of missionaries among the Sioux, from originals at Boston in the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; of about twenty German immigrant letters, through the courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin; of four items in the Hamilton Fish Papers at Columbia University; and of numerous letters in the C. C. Washburn Papers at Madison. When it is added that throughout the year the society has continued to receive calendar cards for data of Minnesota and Mississippi Valley interest in the federal archives, that it has transferred a large mass of archives from the office of the Minnesota secretary of state, and that it has taken over a considerable body of St. Paul and Ramsey County archives, it will be plain that there has been no lack of vigor in the activity of the society in adding to the precious historical materials of which it is custodian.

This is not the whole story, however. The society has added during the year 431 items to its museum collection, increasing its historical, ethnological, numismatic, and archeological resources. Though many of these gifts invite comment, there is space here only to remark that some of them have forwarded the society's project of building up a collection depicting life in a typical Minnesota lumber camp. The picture collection has been increased by 2,027 items, bringing the total to 44,077, of which slightly less

than half are portraits. Among the interesting picture accessions are photographs of 31 water-color paintings by Frank B. Mayer, photostats of 129 sketches by the same artist, sixty-five views of early Minneapolis and St. Anthony struck off from the Sweet-Jacoby negatives and presented by the *Minneapolis Journal* through the courtesy of Mr. Jefferson Jones, and nineteen additions to the "Men of Minnesota" collection sponsored by Lee Brothers of Minneapolis. Mention may also be made of the society's collection of more than a thousand lantern slides, of which 110 were secured in 1932.

Steady progress has been made in classifying, cataloguing, and otherwise caring for incoming materials and the collections in general. The total number of items catalogued for the library was 3,257, an increase of eighteen per cent over last year. Not only current receipts, but also certain groups of materials held over from other years were catalogued; and some Minnesota items of the old classification system were recatalogued. The biographical index has been enlarged by 925 cards, a normal number. Perhaps the most notable development in the library was the installation of a new tier of book stacks on floor C. The considerable task of shifting and rearranging books has, in the main, been done, and the critical condition of shelf crowding has been relieved. More than a beginning has been made in cleaning and sorting the duplicate collection on floor A. Two large and important collections in the manuscript division, the Nelson and Tawney papers, have been arranged, inventoried, and catalogued. The Commodore Davidson Papers were arranged by the donor, Miss Sarah A. Davidson, and have also been inventoried. The general inventory of the society's personal collections of manuscript papers, a project that should prove of importance to historical scholarship, is nearing completion. Though handicapped by the lack of a curator of archives, the staff has nevertheless managed to do not a little work

in the cleaning and arranging of state archives. In the museum not only have incoming materials been handled, but twenty special exhibits have been set up during the year, including an extensive Washington bi-centennial display drawn from the library and manuscript division as well as from the museum. After a decade of tremendous growth the society was generally so crowded as to be almost at the bursting point when, late in the year, the department of education was transferred to its quarters in the new office building and the society moved into the space vacated, with the exception of a portion of one floor to which the offices of the Minnesota department of the American Legion have been transferred. For the manuscript, museum, library, and editorial divisions the space made available was imperatively needed.

Statistics are not always a reliable guide to the significance of the use made in a given year of the society's materials, but they may reveal important trends and suggest interesting questions. The number of library users has remained nearly constant—4,684 in 1932, some thirty more than a year ago. Why, however, has the number of users of the society's manuscripts increased from 373 in 1930 to 454 in 1931 and to 542 in 1932—an advance of thirty-one per cent in two years? Why has the number of readers of bound volumes in the newspaper collection increased from 1,239 in 1931 to 1,890 in 1932—an advance of more than fifty per cent? These increases are related to serious research, and it may be noted that scholars have come here from as far away as California, Pennsylvania, Montana, and Michigan. Why, on the other hand, did the number of museum visitors drop from 27,550 to 25,300? Perhaps the answer is that the more casual visiting has been decreased and the more serious use increased by the economic difficulties of the times. In any event, it may fairly be said that the society's resources have been utilized vigorously throughout the year.

The "Information Bureau" has sent out reports in response to 220 inquiries as compared with 261 in 1931 and 204 in 1930. The inquiries came from Minnesota, ten other states, the District of Columbia, England, and Germany, and touched such diverse subjects as the Great Lakes fisheries, German immigration to the state, the discovery of Lake Itasca, biographical information about Minnesota people, and the recent history of the state. Sixty-six inquiries were from public school teachers. It should be added that through the monthly *Minnesota Historical News* more than seventy brief stories and articles have been sent to about 350 newspapers; and that the reference librarian answers several hundred inquiries a year over the telephone, many from state offices.

It is an established policy of the society to give assistance in organizing and developing the work of county historical societies. The genuine vitality of the local history movement is attested by the fact that, notwithstanding hard times, two new county historical societies and one municipal society were formed in the state in 1932, bringing the total of local organizations to twenty-nine. It may be recalled that the movement was born just a decade ago, with the organization of the St. Louis County Historical Society.

The work of preparing and erecting historical markers along the trunk highways in coöperation with the state highway department has progressed steadily. Twenty additional inscriptions were prepared during the year, bringing the total to eighty-two, distributed in forty-nine counties. In some cases, as that of the Mayo marker at Le Sueur, community celebrations have accompanied the placing of these historical reminders. Considerable progress has been made, with the coöperation of county groups and individuals, on the work of the Minnesota Historical Survey, and records of more than 250 historical markers and monuments in the state are now on file.

An outstanding special activity of the year was the presentation of a series of radio talks on Minnesota history from the university station WLB. Six staff members cooperated in the enterprise, and the sixteen talks given were all published in the *Minnesota Alumni Weekly*. One of them, by Mr. Babcock, was also published in two other places, including the *United States Daily* of Washington. The series carried the story of Minnesota to the Civil War. A second series to be given this year will take it up at that point and continue it to the present day.

Among other special activities that can only be alluded to were two exhibits at the state fair, one centering about the highway marking project, and the other depicting costumes of the sixties; fifty-five talks and papers by members of the staff, in addition to the radio series, chiefly before local clubs, but including two teachers' colleges, three high schools, several county historical societies, community celebrations at Warroad, Le Sueur, and Mankato, and a study club in St. Cloud; a trip by the curator of manuscripts to Ottawa in search of Minnesota material; service by the superintendent as chairman of the program committee of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association; and attendance by staff members at meetings of various professional societies, including the American Library Association and the Mississippi Valley and American Historical associations. Not a few members of the staff have contributed to the society's own magazine and to various regional and national periodicals. The head of the newspaper department has edited two groups of documents for the *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* and the curator of the museum has contributed an article to the same magazine. The curator of manuscripts published a special article on Schoolcraft and, as a piece of private research, is completing a study of American foreign commerce in the first half of the nineteenth century. The superintendent edited a

book of Sibley materials that has been published by the newly established Voyageur Press of Minneapolis.

The many and varied activities that this report discloses could not be carried on successfully without an efficient and coöperative staff. With such a staff it has been a delight to guide the work of the society. The wise counsel of the president and of the members of the executive committee has also been a large factor in the achievements of the year. Two staff members have resigned, both of whom have given faithful service: Clara M. Penfield, cataloguer, because of long-continued illness; and Elizabeth Ross, catalogue typist, to devote her time to home duties; and their positions have been filled, respectively, by the appointments of Leone Ingram, a well-trained and experienced cataloguer; and Louise Hedberg, who has done considerable work for the society in the past as a special assistant.

As this report is written, the recommendations of the budget commissioner and the governor to the legislature in relation to the biennium 1933-35 are not available. The society's budget, submitted after approval by the executive committee, was drawn with an eye to the actual needs of the institution. The total, which is \$53,700 for each year of the biennium, allows for no permanent improvements but does make room for the creation of the urgently needed position of archivist at \$2,000 a year. Under the archives act a vast body of official Minnesota records has been turned over to the society, and its administration, coupled with that of the great war records collection taken over from the defunct war records commission, places a burden upon the present manuscript division which it lacks staff facilities adequately to carry. Some states, with separate archives departments, spend many thousands of dollars upon the care of their noncurrent records, and the society's request for one position in relation to this work is very modest. That it will be granted, the urgency for economy being what it is, may be doubtful, but its need is so patent

that it cannot long be delayed. Even if this modest request is granted, the budget total for the coming biennium represents a decrease of \$4,408.45 as compared with expenditures in the present biennium. The society demonstrated last summer its willingness to bear its share in needed economies when the staff accepted the governor's proposal in the matter of a payless vacation and thereby effected, for the last fiscal year, an economy for the state of \$1,098.33. It seems probable that further similar adjustments will be required. Meanwhile, the society, performing a large, varied, and important service to the people, with a modest-salaried staff that is distinctly professional in its ideals and training, is of its own accord practicing rigorous economy in its affairs, moved by the firm purpose of making its resources go as far as possible in making history serve Minnesota.

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MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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