

THE 1933 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The thirteenth annual conference on local history work in Minnesota formed the opening session of the Minnesota Historical Society's eighty-fourth annual meeting, held on Monday, January 16, in St. Paul. With Judge Julius E. Haycraft of Fairmont, president of the Martin County Historical Society, presiding, the conference convened at 10:00 A.M. at the St. Paul Athletic Club. About fifty persons were in attendance. The discussion centered on selected planks in a program of "State-wide Historical Planning." The steady growth of the local history movement in Minnesota since the first conference was held in 1921 suggested the timeliness of this theme for the thirteenth conference, which emphasized the need of a program of historical work suitable for immediate adoption by the local historical units of the state.

Judge William E. Scott, secretary of the Lake County Historical Society, dealt with the plank relating to the state-wide survey of historic sites and markers, which is being undertaken through the Minnesota Historical Survey, with Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the museum of the state society, as director. Following an account of the organization and procedure of the survey, which has been progressing since the spring of 1930, Judge Scott examined the survey from the standpoint of the individual county. He suggested that each county prepare an historical map of the county indicating historic sites that are suitable for permanent marking. In the course of his talk he referred to the project for historic marking along the Minnesota trunk highways that is being carried on jointly by the state historical society and the highway department. Since it is

difficult to read the inscriptions on the trunk highway historic markers from a moving vehicle, he suggested changing the wording of the warning signs for these markers from "Historic site ahead" to "Stop. Historic site ahead."

Among the chief planks in the suggested state-wide program of historical activity was the establishment of county newspaper collections, which was discussed by Mr. Herman Roe, publisher of the *Northfield News*. The newspaper, he declared, in addition to being what is probably the local historian's most valuable source of information, is a kind of material particularly difficult to assemble after a lapse of time. Mr. Roe stressed the advantages of a county newspaper collection in which the files of *all* the county newspapers are preserved. Such a collection, for example, would supplement for a given county the comprehensive collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. Although approximately six hundred and fifty daily and weekly papers are published in Minnesota, limitations of space and funds restrict the number of papers that can be cared for by the state society to about four hundred and fifty. A county newspaper collection, furthermore, might relieve the amount of wear upon the state society's much used collection. The speaker suggested that two sets of county papers should be preserved, one for a permanent file and another for clipping purposes, and that the entire collection should be kept in fireproof quarters. With the warning that the wood-pulp stock upon which present-day newspapers are printed will not last a hundred years, he spoke of the necessity for rag-paper editions for permanent preservation. He exhibited samples of his own newspaper printed on both wood-pulp and rag-paper stock.

The next speaker at the conference was Professor Ernest S. Osgood of the University of Minnesota, who presented a talk on possibilities in community study. Many persons, he suggested, after studying a frontier community for a particular period, feel that their conclusions are influenced by

the commonly accepted generalizations applied to the frontier, rather than by facts "erected out of a patient and exhaustive study of the historical materials" of a local community. After touching briefly upon the value and methods of the "microscopic method" of historical investigation, as developed by Dr. Joseph Schafer, superintendent of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the speaker pointed out the chief categories of material for the historian of the local community. The local historical society, Dr. Osgood concluded, can render signal assistance not only in the preservation and collection of historical materials, but in the writing of the history of the localities within its jurisdiction.

The opportunities for stimulating interest in local history through the schools formed the background for the plank on educational activities of local historical societies, which was discussed by Mr. William S. Culkin, president of the St. Louis County Historical Society. He likened an historical society to a "photographic institution" and counselled local historians not to "approach the schools with any sort of propaganda." While it is not possible to make an historian out of every child, he emphasized that an appreciation of local history can be developed among school children. Historical programs in the schools are among the most useful devices in this field, Mr. Culkin explained. For the greatest effectiveness he advised that they be given only occasionally, after careful planning. He then described a school program that had been conducted in Duluth by the St. Louis County Historical Society. "We can interest the schools in this type of work," he said, "without much trouble or expense."

The preservation and organization of county archives formed another plank in the conference program. "By learning what is in the records of the local courthouse and by convincing county officials of the importance of these records, the local historical society can render a great service to the state, to the Minnesota Historical Society, and

to the cause of historical research," asserted Dr. Grace Lee Nute, curator of manuscripts for the state historical society, who discussed this subject. Activity in this field, she recalled, got under way in 1916, when the field agent of the state society began a survey of county archives. The continuation of this work, which had to stop after the archives of sixteen counties were listed, forms a highly practical activity for local historical societies, the speaker said. As evidence of the value of county archives, Dr. Nute described the records found by the society's field agent in Washington County, many of which go back to 1840, when that region was part of St. Croix County in Wisconsin Territory. Eventually, she said, we must all work for an archives statute in Minnesota that will safeguard the accumulating wealth of county and state records.

Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, superintendent of the state society, brought the discussion of the local history conference to a close with a brief talk on the collection and preservation of church records. "All over Minnesota are churches that have records," he said; and "our attention is almost daily being called to the importance of these church records, particularly by the increasing number of anniversary programs." Such records, he continued, constitute important sources for the social and cultural, even the economic, history of a community. After giving some concrete illustrations of how the historian can use church records, he made a few observations on points raised during the conference. For example, he stressed the importance of locating and preserving old newspaper files as well as of collecting contemporary issues. The use of films he regarded as the ultimate solution for the problem of newspapers which are printed on paper stock that will not stand the test of time. In conclusion, he urged that local historians should formulate comprehensive programs of historical work, integrating the details and parts.

A luncheon session at the St. Paul Athletic Club, which

was attended by about a hundred and twenty members and friends of the society, followed the local history conference. Dean Guy Stanton Ford of the University of Minnesota, the society's president, presided and introduced as the first speaker on the luncheon program Dr. F. I. Herriott, professor of political science in Drake University at Des Moines, Iowa, who presented a paper entitled "Lincoln's First Nomination for the Presidency." Dr. Herriott challenged the assertion by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America* that Lincoln's first nomination "bewildered and shocked New York, Boston, and all points east." With an illuminating array of evidence based on years of meticulous research, the speaker proved that Lincoln, for sixteen years preceding his nomination, had an interstate reputation as a forceful speaker, first for the Whig party and then for the antislavery groups that finally were welded into the Republican party in 1856.

"Civil War Years in Shakopee" was the subject of the second paper on the luncheon program, which was presented by Mr. Julius A. Coller, II, of Shakopee. After sketching the rise of Shakopee from a log trading post on the banks of the Minnesota River in 1851 to its incorporation as a city six years later, with a population of more than eleven hundred persons, he described the depressing effects of the Civil War and the Sioux Outbreak upon the infant municipality. Vigorous quotations from contemporary Shakopee newspapers contributed to a graphic portrayal of life in the Shakopee community during the trying years of the early sixties.

Dean Ford next introduced Judge Haycraft, whose talk was entitled "A Judge Looks at History." Judge Haycraft began by pointing out that "many of the great events of history are in such a state of uncertainty that one wonders what has really happened." As an example of the contradictory conclusions that can be drawn from the records of the past, he observed that "one can prove by those

present that when Lincoln delivered his immortal address at Gettysburg it was received with tremendous applause, that it was received in silence, that it was instantly recognized as a masterpiece, or that its greatness was not appreciated until years afterward." He declared that Minnesota was fortunate in having had a Dr. Folwell, whose indefatigable labors late in life resulted in his monumental *History of Minnesota*. "It should be the duty of every historical society," he said, "whether national, state, or local, so to preserve the record of events of this generation that it may be handed down to future generations, and, what is of the greatest importance, that it shall be a truthful record of what took place."

At the conclusion of Judge Haycraft's talk, Dean Ford announced plans for the celebration by the University of Minnesota in February, 1933, of the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dr. Folwell, who was the university's first president. Dean Ford then introduced to the audience Mrs. James T. Morris of Minneapolis, a member of the society's executive council who was recently made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor by the French government in recognition of her important work in assembling the names of the French soldiers who died at Yorktown.

The afternoon session convened in the auditorium of the Historical Building at 3:00 P. M., with Dean Ford presiding and about fifty persons in attendance. Mr. Everett H. Bailey presented his report as treasurer and Dr. Theodore C. Blegen then gave his annual report upon the activities and progress of the society during the previous year. The following thirty members of the society were then elected to serve as members of the executive council during the triennium 1933-36: Charles E. Adams, James D. Armstrong, Everett H. Bailey, Theodore C. Blegen, Ralph Budd, the Reverend William Busch, Homer P. Clark, William W. Cutler, Burt W. Eaton, Guy Stanton Ford, Mrs. Charles E. Furness, Edward C. Gale, Harold Harris,

Julius E. Haycraft, Thomas Hughes, Frederick G. Ingersoll, Jefferson Jones, Victor E. Lawson, William H. Lightner, James M. McConnell, George R. Martin, Dr. William J. Mayo, John F. D. Meighen, Mrs. James T. Morris, Ira C. Oehler, Victor Robertson, William E. Scott, Lester B. Shippee, Charles Stees, and Warren Upham. At a meeting of the new executive council in the superintendent's office later in the afternoon the following officers of the society were elected for the next three years: William W. Cutler, president; Mrs. Charles E. Furness and Edward C. Gale, vice presidents; Theodore C. Blegen, secretary; and Everett H. Bailey, treasurer.

After the business portion of the afternoon session Dean Ford introduced Mr. Victor G. Pickett of Minneapolis, who read a paper by his sister, Ida Pickett Bell, entitled "Family Life in Pioneer Minnesota." This consisted of extracts from a letter that he had received from Mrs. Bell, in which she recorded her impressions of five years of pioneer life in southern Minnesota. The recollections open with 1860, when, with her parents, Mrs. Bell started on a month's journey by covered wagon from Wisconsin to the village of Itasca, a little hamlet near "a handful of houses that was called Albert Lea"; and the account ends with the return of her father from the Civil War in 1865. Mrs. Bell presents an intimate picture of life in a little two-room portable home, the "best room" of which served as a schoolroom for the children of the Itasca settlement during the winter of 1860-61. She describes the terror spread by the Sioux Outbreak, which caused a temporary abandonment of her Itasca home; and her account reflects the spirited rivalry between Itasca and Albert Lea "to get the county seat."

The final session of the annual meeting, which convened at 8:00 P.M. in the auditorium of the Historical Building, was attended by about a hundred and twenty-five persons. Mr. William W. Cutler, the society's new president, pre-

sided and introduced as the speaker of the evening Dr. August C. Krey, professor of history in the University of Minnesota, who gave the annual address on the subject of "History in the Modern World." Dr. Krey presented a penetrating and impressive analysis of the relation of historical knowledge to modern technology and concluded that "the greater the progress of technology, the greater and more wide-spread must be the study of history to support it." Following the annual address, which is published in this issue of MINNESOTA HISTORY, an informal reception was held in the museum rooms, at which refreshments were served by members of the society's staff. Since the national election of 1860 figured prominently in a number of papers presented during the day's sessions, some early election material was displayed in a table case in the museum. In this exhibit were two original Lincoln ballots for the election of 1860, one of which was lent by Mr. Charles Stees of St. Paul, a member of the society's executive council.

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MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL



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