

RECENT PROGRESS OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY¹

In the midst of the storm and turbulence of the last year both nation and state have given a large place to history and its meaning in contemporary life. The exposition at Chicago was in a sense a visual interpretation of a century of progress for America and the world. In Minnesota, a diamond jubilee stimulated wide interest in the state's development during three-quarters of a century.

The Minnesota Historical Society took the lead in planning and promoting a state-wide observance of this seventy-fifth anniversary. The Governor gave official sanction and encouragement to the idea by issuing a proclamation designating 1933 as Minnesota's "Diamond Jubilee Year." The society arranged a Statehood Day program, with Senator Kellogg and Dean Ford among the speakers. It planned for the week of May 11 a series of programs from five radio broadcasting stations in the Northwest. It published a "Diamond Jubilee Number" of MINNESOTA HISTORY, including an interpretation of "The Heritage of Minnesota" by Governor Olson. It set up a committee of thirty which encouraged local historical societies, clubs, newspapers, business firms, and many different kinds of organizations to join in the celebration. It cooperated with the department of education in drafting an anniversary program for the schools. It gave counsel in the preparation of a great pageant that was presented at Itasca State Park. It cooperated with the University of Minnesota in planning a special Diamond Jubilee convocation. It contributed largely to a Diamond Jubilee history of Minnesota pub-

¹ This report on the activities of the Minnesota Historical Society in 1933 was read at the afternoon session of the eighty-fifth annual meeting of the society, which was held in the Historical Building, St. Paul, on January 8. *Ed.*

lished by a St. Paul newspaper. Its staff members spoke at numerous meetings on the significance of the anniversary. That all these activities, centering about the history of the North Star State, have served to quicken interest in history and to promote understanding of the backgrounds of the present is certain.

The eighty-fourth annual meeting, held on January 16, was marked by well-attended sessions and interesting discussions and papers, including Professor Krey's searching analysis of the rôle of "History in the Machine Age." This address, after being published in our own magazine, was placed before the teachers of the entire country through the *Historical Outlook* of Philadelphia. The forwarding of the Diamond Jubilee took the place of the usual summer tour as a society project for stimulating state historical interest. In the fall a successful public meeting was held at which Professor Stephen Leacock delighted a large audience with an address calling for critical revision in the historical treatment of a figure of the French régime, the Baron de Lahontan.

The society's membership roll has begun to show the effects of the impact of hard times. Not a few of the members belong to professional groups for whom salary decreases coupled with the rise in the cost of living have made 1933 a very difficult period. As a result a considerable number have felt obliged temporarily to cancel their memberships. The society's active membership a year ago was 1,473; today it is 1,385. During the year 66 new members have been enrolled and one reinstated, but this gain has been much more than offset by the deaths of 36 members and the withdrawal of 119. Thus there has been a net loss of 88. The number of subscribing schools and libraries, which also have been passing through a very difficult period, has been reduced from 192 to 184; and the institutional membership remains at 28. An encouraging

aspect of the situation is that almost without exception those who have withdrawn have expressed keen regret at the necessity and have written hopefully of rejoining later. The mere fact that during this tumultuous year more than sixty new members have been enrolled shows that there are many people throughout the state who, if the matter of membership is put before them, will gladly join. The active coöperation of the present members in reaching these people can contribute effectively to the continued stability of the society.

A busy program of research and publication has been carried on during the year. The distribution of the second volume of *Minnesota in the War with Germany* has now been completed; and the second volume in the *Narratives and Documents* series has been put through the press for publication sometime in 1934. The latter, which will bear the title *Crusader and Feminist*, contains a series of letters written between 1858 and 1865 by Jane Grey Swisshelm, pioneer St. Cloud editor, lecturer, antislavery agitator, and advocate of woman's rights. The volume should prove of wide interest for the light that it throws upon state and national conditions in a period of great events and for the picture that it discloses of the mind and personality of a remarkable American woman. It has been competently edited by the newspaper librarian, who has supplied it with a compact historical introduction and necessary explanatory notes. Various other editorial enterprises, looking toward possible future publication, are planned or are under way, conceived with emphasis upon lasting quality, utility to the state, and economy. The society, in its steadily growing collections, possesses priceless treasures of manuscripts and other documentary sources which can be drawn upon to illustrate and to explain the forces that have made the great commonwealth of today.

The quarterly magazine, *MINNESOTA HISTORY*, which

has now completed its fourteenth volume, furnishes a close bond between the society and its members, is much used in the schools and libraries of the state, and reaches an audience far beyond the boundaries of Minnesota. In the four issues brought out in 1933 there were twenty-nine articles, notes, and documents, and some twenty book reviews, representing contributions from thirty-five scholars and writers, including Professor Leacock, Allan Nevins, Frances Densmore, and August C. Krey. The content has been varied, with studies in such fields as the significance of history, the part played by newspapers in Minnesota life, frontier social conditions, the emergence of the state, church history, a pioneer artist, and critical discussions of moot questions. A much appreciated service of the magazine is its current reports on historical activities throughout the state and especially its accounts of the work of county and municipal historical societies.

Through the monthly *Minnesota Historical News* the society continues to supply the press of the state with brief historical articles and news items; and the quarterly *Check List of Minnesota Public Documents* has been issued regularly for the use of officials, librarians, and students.

A fundamental task of the society is that of building up its collection of records of Minnesota's history. It is a task that can be done successfully only by vigilance, hard work, and planning, and with that cordial coöperation of the public that is a fruit of good will and of the wide historical interest aroused by the society's many-sided public activities. What is the record for 1933? Books added to the library, including newspaper volumes and accessioned pamphlets, numbered 2,556, sixty per cent of which came in as gifts, thirty-one per cent as purchases, and nine per cent as exchanges. The size of the library has been increased to 178,693 items. A noteworthy development was the generous action of the Daughters of the American Revolu-

tion in deciding to make some additions each year to the genealogical collection, starting in 1933 with the purchase of seven books. An interesting gift was a group of some fifty volumes on the Robertson family and Scottish history, presented by Mr. Victor Robertson of the society's executive council. Among many other library accessions of interest may be mentioned a file of the rare *Sauk Rapids Frontiersman* from 1855 to 1858; a German translation of Jonathan Carver's *Travels*, published at Hamburg in 1780; a number of early books relating to German immigration to America; a file of the *Evangelical Review* from 1849 to 1860; and fifteen volumes of the *Canadian Journal of Industry, Science, and Art* from 1856 to 1878. Some 1,150 periodicals and 530 daily and weekly newspapers were received regularly.

Gifts of manuscripts include an orderly book kept in the French and Indian War on the Montreal campaign of 1760; a diary kept in the middle forties by the noted Methodist circuit rider Chauncey Hobart; the autobiography of an Irishwoman who journeyed from Ireland to New Orleans in 1850, up the Mississippi to Galena, and, four years later, to Minnesota; the memoirs of a Caledonia pioneer which include an interesting account of Indian and Civil War experiences; the papers of Jason C. Easton, a leading banker of southern Minnesota, covering the years from 1856 to 1901 and including six hundred letter books, ledgers, and other volumes, and a small mountain of correspondence; a notable addition to the Benjamin Densmore Papers; five scrapbooks kept from 1875 to 1922 by Charles M. Loring, leader in the public parks movement; the Andrew A. Veblen Papers, which are of special interest for the history of the Norwegian-American *lags* and for the story of a brilliant middle-western family that included the famous economist Thorstein Veblen; additions to the papers of Senator Nelson; the correspondence accumulated by Gov-

ernor Preus while campaigning for a seat in the Senate in 1923; and a detailed record of Stearns County in the World War. A deposit of extraordinary interest is the minute book of the first Granger organization in Minnesota, the North Star Grange of St. Paul, which was active from 1868 to 1884. The society has continued to augment its records of institutions of various kinds by securing, among others, those of the Minnesota Women's Suffrage Association, the Better Business Bureau of Minneapolis, the Minnesota Homeopathic Institute, and the Political Equality Club of Minneapolis.

By means of photostats, films, and typewritten transcripts, many other historical records of special interest and value have been made available. These include more than seven hundred pages of documents in the French archives relating chiefly to the early French explorers and traders in the upper Northwest; some fifty documents in the Public Record Office in London relating to Radisson and Groseilliers; a group of letters written by the noted explorer, Joseph N. Nicollet, from 1835 to 1842, the originals of which are in New York and Pennsylvania; a dozen or more letters—some of them written at Grand Portage—of the Catholic missionary Francis Pierz for the period from 1835 to 1840, the originals of which are in Krainburg, Jugoslavia; eight letters of Henry H. Sibley secured from Michigan; the "Journal of a Canoe Voyage from the Falls of St. Anthony to St. Louis" in 1848 by the noted panoramist Henry Lewis, the original of which is owned by a gentleman in Toronto; Minnesota letters written by Dr. Thomas S. Williamson, Indian missionary, the originals of which are in the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions at Boston; a dozen letters written by Robert Haines as a member of the geological survey of the Northwest in the late forties; more than forty letters written by George W. Northrup from 1852 to 1864, including

reports on his experiences as a school teacher at Pembina; the schedules of the Minnesota census for 1857, the originals of which are in the federal archives; numerous Minnesota items culled from eastern newspapers in the fifties and sixties; and early installments of a group of some ten thousand pages of Minnesota letters in the American Home Missionary Society Papers at Chicago. The society continues to receive calendar cards for data of Minnesota interest in the federal archives at Washington.

The society has added 802 objects to its museum collection, nearly double the number received last year. Of this almost bewildering array of historical, ethnological, numismatic, and archeological items, only two or three can be mentioned here. The lumber camp collection has been augmented by some very interesting items; a plaster model of the Chippewa Indian statue that was dedicated at the site of the Old Crossing Treaty last summer has been received from the sculptor, Mr. Carl Mose; and the navy department, through the courtesy of Congressman Kvale, has presented the brass bell of the Civil War battleship "Minnesota." The picture collection has been increased by 1,947 items, bringing the total to 46,024, of which 21,843 are portraits. There have been forty-five additions to the "Men of Minnesota" collection sponsored by Lee Brothers of Minneapolis. More than two hundred slides have been added to the slide collection, which now numbers 1,326. Two oil paintings of unusual interest have come to the society through the generous intervention of two members of the council. A view of the Mississippi at St. Anthony in 1852, painted by R. Sloan, is the gift of Mr. Everett H. Bailey of St. Paul; and a painting of the Mississippi near Red Wing, done in 1854 by George H. Durrie, is the gift of Mr. Jefferson Jones of Minneapolis. With the Durrie painting is a notebook containing clippings of letters written on a journey to Minnesota in 1854 by Colo-

nel James Babcock for the *New Haven Palladium*, of which he was the editor.

The staff has been kept unusually busy by the routine work of accessioning, classifying, and cataloguing its growing collections, coupled with rearrangements and expansion in the building and service to visitors and users of its resources. The newly occupied rooms on the main and second floors were greatly improved by covering the floors with linoleum and redecorating the walls; wall bookcases were installed in certain rooms; and some much needed furniture was added, chiefly tables, desks, reading stands, and chairs. A workroom on floor A was partitioned and put in working order; the first-floor museum exhibits were installed and opened to the public; and the manuscript division was established in its new quarters on the second floor.

In the library 2,797 items were catalogued, and 16,331 cards were added to the various card index files; the biographical index was enlarged by 1,235 entries, about twenty-five per cent more than last year; and there was considerable shifting and cleaning of books. Not a few enterprises, however, were slowed down because of curtailment of special services under the economy budget. The museum arranged twenty-six special exhibits in addition to the society's state fair display, which featured illuminated transparencies of early Minnesota scenes; sent out more loan exhibits than in any previous year, having on one day no less than twenty-five special exhibits on display in St. Paul store windows; cleaned nearly the entire picture collection; and handled the routine tasks of accessioning incoming materials. In the manuscript division emphasis has been placed upon arranging special manuscript collections, calendaring the Sibley Papers, completing the inventory of personal papers, perfecting new and improved methods of manuscript repair work, and experimenting with Leica photography and film slides to replace the photostat. Considerable new photo-

graphic equipment, including a Leica camera and projector, has been acquired, and the society has obtained film slides of a vast collection of Minnesota manuscripts in Chicago. We are pioneering in a very good cause, for the film method unquestionably has tremendous possibilities for historical work everywhere.

A special historical society project involving a number of related tasks outside the regular staff routine is under way with the aid of eight workers allotted to the society by the Civil Works Administration. This project, newly launched, is at once affording relief to needy workers and forwarding enterprises of value to the society and the state, including the mounting of pictures, the preparation of a subject index for the picture collection, the completion of an index to the society's non-Minnesota newspapers, the cataloguing of the Torrance Collection, the transcribing of fading manuscripts and of diaries and letters that are on temporary deposit with the society, and similar tasks.

Visitors to the museum during the year numbered 35,000 as compared with about 25,000 last year. The number includes some 6,000 persons who comprised 246 school classes and special groups. Decreases in the numbers of people using libraries last summer were noted throughout the country; and comparatively light summer use explains the fact that the society's library shows a decrease for the year, 4,314 as compared with 4,684 in 1932. It is interesting to note, however, that the newspaper department had more readers than in any previous year, 1,970, representing Minnesota and eighteen other states. There has been a steady rise in the use of that department for a number of years. In 1929, for example, there were only 851 readers. The explanation is to be found in part in an increasing recognition of the value of the newspaper collection for commercial and legal as well as for historical research purposes. The manuscript division had 414 users, including a nation-

ally known novelist, scholars from many parts of the country, a Swiss historian, a biographer of Schoolcraft, a city planning expert, lawyers seeking historical light on points involved in litigation, and many university and college students preparing papers and theses. The "Information Bureau" has responded to approximately two hundred inquiries during the year, sixty of them from teachers. They represent the usual wide range of subjects and have come from people in Minnesota and twenty-three other states.

The movement for the local organization of historical work and interest is one that the society has sponsored actively for more than a decade. Each year new progress is made and it requires no prophet's vision to perceive that the day is approaching when all the counties in the state will have organized local history societies. Doubtless the state's Diamond Jubilee served as a stimulus to the advance of the local history movement. At all events, in 1933 five new county historical societies and one new municipal society were formed, bringing the total to thirty-two county and three municipal societies. Who can measure the value to locality and to state of this battalion of local historical societies, most of them vital and active? Another event of wide significance is the reorganization of the Catholic Historical Society of St. Paul. This has been accompanied by the resumption of publication of *Acta et Dicta*, an important periodical devoted to Minnesota Catholic history.

The Minnesota Historical Survey continues to assemble information on markers and monuments in the state and now has records of 275. Little progress has been made during the year on the highway marking project, but a few additional inscriptions have been prepared, bringing the total from 82 to 88. It is expected that special attention will be devoted to the project during 1934.

The society's radio history of Minnesota, launched in 1932 from the University of Minnesota broadcasting sta-

tion, has been continued through the year and must be considered one of the most effective of the society's many public educational activities. Since October the story of the state has been carried from the nineties to the present, and it will be completed with a series of twelve talks from January to April. These will include such interesting subjects as the history of Minnesota medicine, the story of the press, the development of state taxation, Minnesota's financial history, recent cultural trends, Minnesota literature, and twentieth-century education. From the beginning the radio talks have been published in the *Minnesota Alumni Weekly*. Twelve of them have recently been given a second radio presentation, from station KSTP, through the interest of the Minnesota Daughters of the American Revolution.

Special activities that can only be mentioned include more than seventy talks and papers by staff members, most of them given before audiences in the Twin Cities, but including also organization meetings of three county historical societies, program meetings of several other local history groups, the dedication of the Old Crossing treaty monument, and the annual meetings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the American Association of Museums; the election of the curator of manuscripts to the executive council of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association; the appointment of the superintendent to the editorial board of the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*; the attendance of several members of the library staff at the annual meeting of the American Library Association; searches by Dr. Nute for Minnesota materials in Boston and Toronto and progress by her in an intensive study of the careers of Radisson and Groseilliers; contributions by several staff members to the *Dictionary of American Biography*; progress under Miss Krausnick's direction toward the compilation of a check list of Minnesota's territorial documents; contributions by several staff members to the

North Dakota Historical Quarterly and other magazines; the progress of Miss Jerabek's studies of the Bohemian element; an investigation by Miss Ackermann of the Minnesota Pioneer Guard; work by Miss Wheelhouse on a manual of editorial style; and a hunt by Miss Heilbron, with the assistance of the librarian, for paintings and manuscript records of Henry Lewis, which culminated in finding the artist's hitherto unknown diary. It is perhaps proper also to mention in this report an exceedingly valuable volume recently brought out by the University of Minnesota Press for the Minnesota society of the Colonial Dames of America—*Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, edited by Charles M. Gates, with an introduction by Dr. Nute. The society coöperated with the Colonial Dames in this project and furnished through its manuscript division four of the documents included in the volume.

Dr. Warren Upham, who was taken ill late in 1932, proved unable to resume his duties as archeologist, and last June, in recognition of his long and faithful services to the society, he was appointed to the honorary position of archeologist emeritus. The former position of archeologist was merged with that of curator of the museum. Mr. Donald E. Van Koughnet, research and general assistant, resigned on September 15 in order to resume his studies at Harvard University. For the present, the superintendent and several other members of the staff have taken over his duties, but ultimately it will be necessary to reestablish the position. Miss Gertrude Ackermann was appointed manuscript assistant on July 1; and Mrs. Louise Hedberg Blad of the cataloguing staff was assigned to part-time duty in the manuscript division. Special assistance, paid for on the hour basis, has had to be curtailed drastically under the current budget. This has affected the library particularly and has complicated the problem of checking gift collections, preparing materials for binding, and doing scores of special

tasks that, although not routine duties, are unavoidable in the administration of a great collection of books, pamphlets, and newspapers.

The budget as passed by the last legislature allotted to the society \$41,500.00 for each year of the present biennium, assigning \$15,000.00 to supplies and expenses and \$26,500.00 to salaries and wages. Under this appropriation, with unexpended balances held over from the preceding biennium, a budget was worked out and was approved by the budget commissioner under which the society is being conducted as effectively as possible. The society had hoped, in view of urgent need, that its request for a curator of archives would be met, but the hope was disappointed. The decrease of \$9,300.00 in the regular appropriations has made necessary, as has been indicated, a sharp curtailment of special services and severe retrenchment in other respects. The society recognized the urgency of the economic problem that the state faced, however, and this report may perhaps bear witness of the earnestness with which the staff has carried on despite a reduced budget. The members of the staff have accepted, cheerfully and without complaint, the salary reductions that were necessary under the budget.

This is the general picture that emerges from an analysis of the society's activities during 1933: an institution in a critical period of state and national history attempting to make its energies, abilities, and resources go as far as possible toward serving the needs of Minnesota. This service has come to a focus especially in the collection and preservation of the historical records of the state and its people; in the efficient administration of those records; and in carrying Minnesota history to the people in many ways with a view to making the historical record available and to humanizing and deepening historical knowledge.

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MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL



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