

## THE STATE HISTORICAL CONVENTION OF 1934<sup>1</sup>

Two important Minnesota centennials are being observed this year. One is that of the arrival at Fort Snelling on May 6, 1834, of Samuel and Gideon Pond, missionaries among the Sioux Indians; and the other is that of the coming of Henry H. Sibley to Minnesota in October of the same year and the launching of his active career in this region. The Minnesota Historical Society planned its twelfth state historical tour and convention around certain special places with which the Ponds and Sibley were associated and included in the program papers and addresses setting forth their services to state and nation.

The tour was held on Saturday, June 14. Three chartered busses carried passengers from Minneapolis to the Historical Building in St. Paul, the official starting place. There, in the busses and in some twenty private cars, approximately a hundred and fifty people were ready, at 10:00 A. M., to follow a guide car furnished by the St. Paul police department to the first stopping place—the College of St. Catherine. A brief visit was made to the college chapel, where the tones of a pipe organ sounded a greeting to the visitors and where Sister Eleanor explained some points of special interest in relation to the architecture, building materials, and decorations of this very beautiful hall of worship.

Fifty or more people joined the tour at the college campus, from which the motorcade proceeded to the grounds of old Fort Snelling. There an even larger number fell in with the tourists, and more than three hundred persons

<sup>1</sup> This account of the annual tour and convention of the Minnesota Historical Society is based upon a report drawn up by Miss Gertrude Ackermann, the society's manuscript assistant. *Ed.*

thronged the Fort Snelling chapel for the first convention session. At the very heart of Minnesota settlement through a century, President William W. Cutler opened proceedings by introducing the present commandant, General David L. Stone. After welcoming the visitors to the fort, General Stone made a vigorous plea for the introduction of readable narratives of pioneer history into the schools. Children, he urged, should be encouraged to learn about their pioneer ancestors, whose story is epic in its record of bravery and fortitude.

Mr. Cutler then sketched briefly the early historical backgrounds of Minnesota and called upon Professor Edgar B. Wesley of the University of Minnesota for a paper on "The Army and the Westward Movement of the Frontier." Professor Wesley pointed out that the westward movement was sponsored and guided by the government, which provided an army to protect and aid the pioneer settlers. The army surveyed rivers and lakes, built roads, spanned streams with bridges, erected forts, protected mail routes, guarded government stores, regulated hunters and trappers, and generally enforced law and order. Its diverse and exacting duties were made the more difficult because the frontier of settlement was never a regular, always a shifting, line. Military posts were built and, when the advance of settlers caught up with the army, abandoned. The speaker made it clear, however, that the forts were more than military centers. They were also nuclei for industrial and cultural pioneering. Typical of the American frontier posts was Fort Snelling, erected in 1819 as one part of a government plan that had among its objectives the enlargement of the settled area, the extension of the fur trade, and the counteracting of British influence among the Indians.

With this background, the audience was ready for "The Story of Old Fort Snelling," which was told vigorously and interestingly by Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of

the society's museum and manager of the annual tour. He first traced the origins of the fort, which, he said, is "indissolubly linked with the history of Minnesota and the Northwest." After telling of the Pike expedition, he discussed the situation after the War of 1812 and then described the coming of Leavenworth and his troops and the actual beginnings of the fort. The speaker included a detailed account of the buildings of old Fort Snelling and traced the history of the establishment down to recent times. He brought out the fact that Fort Snelling figures prominently in the early agricultural history of Minnesota. "Colonel Leavenworth," he said, "had begun active farming operations early in the spring of 1820, and by midsummer ninety acres were under cultivation in cereal grains, Indian corn, potatoes, and vegetables." The acreage was increased to 210 by 1823, and "farming operations were carried on steadily during most of the period prior to the Civil War." Mr. Babcock related that "soldiers carried the monthly mail to and from Prairie du Chien by canoe in summer and on foot in the winter."

A charming personal touch was added to the audience's picture of pioneer Fort Snelling by the next speaker, Miss Mary J. Newson of St. Paul, who read a reminiscent paper entitled "A Child's Life at Fort Snelling." Miss Newson's father was Thomas McLean Newson, who in 1854 became editor and owner of the *St. Paul Daily Times*. He served as a captain in the commissary department during the Civil War and was brevetted major at its close. For a time after the Sioux Outbreak he was stationed at St. Cloud and at Fort Ripley, but for most of the period up to the end of the war he was commissary at Fort Snelling. Miss Newson drew a sharply etched picture of the fort and its buildings, recalling the grounds as a "great sunny out-door playroom." One scene after another she described as her memory played over the period: a bitter typhoid epidemic, the soldiers' drill, dress parades, the lowering of the fort

flag at sunset gun, and military discipline. She recalled a boy in blue who marched up and down the main walks with his arms and head thrust through openings in a barrel bearing the caption "I Was Drunk Last Night." Other scenes included the punishment of Indians after the Sioux War, a party held when the new commissary warehouse had been completed, the sorrow occasioned by Civil War losses, the death of Lincoln, the return of the soldiers. As Miss Newson considered the changes wrought by time she exclaimed, "No more do wagons and buggies and carriages and carts rock and slip dangerously down a steep dirt and stony road on one precipitous bluff to be ferried leisurely over the Mississippi, and climb laboriously with panting horses the winding way on the other side to the gates. No more do red men in red blankets come, single file, to barter furs at the sutler's store or complain of unjust agents to the 'White Fathers.' No more do men in blue with the soldier's visor present arms or deploy over the green that stretches out under the shade of elm trees now more than a half century old." The speaker was given an ovation as she reached the end of this delightful paper.

Before adjournment of the session, the audience gave a rising vote of thanks to General Stone and his aides for the courtesies and hospitalities shown the visitors by the officers of the fort. It then divided into two groups to visit the round and hexagonal towers, the only structures that have survived the original fort. The smooth and speedy drive across the modern concrete bridge spanning the wide and picturesque Minnesota Valley contrasted sharply with the laborious crossings typical of an earlier day. The view from the Mendota side disclosed clearly the strategic location of Fort Snelling as commanding the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, water routes important to Indians and white men alike.

After a luncheon at the Sibley Tea House attended by more than two hundred and sixty people, the time was all

too short for a thoroughly satisfying ramble through the stone house built by Sibley in 1835 and preserved as an historical museum by the Minnesota Daughters of the American Revolution. As the weather was warm and pleasant, the visitors gathered on the Sibley House lawn under shady willow trees for the next session, Mr. Frederick G. Ingersoll of St. Paul presiding. He introduced Mr. Edward C. Gale of Minneapolis, vice president of the Minnesota Historical Society, as a man who had diligently advanced the society's interests through many years. Mr. Gale, speaking in the shadow of the famous mansion, delighted the audience by suggesting that he would act as a medium for General Sibley himself, who thus would tell his own story. He then read, in Sibley's own words, the story of the events of a century ago that had their setting within the sound of the speaker's voice.

Mrs. Carl T. Thayer then extended greetings from the Daughters of the American Revolution, of which she is state regent. Mrs. Thayer spoke especially of the basic importance of historical research. She expressed appreciation of the aid and coöperation given by the historical society in connection with the marking of historic spots and the planning of radio programs on Minnesota history, and she particularly praised the services to her organization of Mr. Babcock.

Mr. Ingersoll next introduced Mother Antonia, president of the College of St. Catherine. Her paper on "The Old Convent School at Mendota," it was explained, would be read for her by Sister Helen Angela. It dealt with a boarding and day school conducted in the Sibley House from 1867 to 1878 by the Sisters of St. Joseph. The school was attended by the children of the surrounding country and by some of the Sioux Indian children who lived in tipis back of Mendota. The decreasing population of the community led to its discontinuance.

Shortly after 3:00 P. M. the long parade of busses and

automobiles left Mendota, recrossed the bridge, and drove up the Minnesota Valley, which is rich with memories of the adventures of Le Sueur, the first white traveler to ascend the river, of the exploits of Jonathan Carver, and of the host of red men and white who ascended this stream in days gone by. The next session was held in the auditorium of the Shakopee High School. Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, superintendent of the society, presided. The first speaker was Mr. Everett E. Edwards of the United States department of agriculture, who is well known for his bibliographical contributions, especially in the field of American agricultural history. His paper, on "American Indian Contributions to Civilization," published in the present number of MINNESOTA HISTORY, was a comprehensive survey, rich in concrete detail and convincing in its claims of influence credited to the Indian.

The chairman then introduced Miss Gertrude B. Gove of Windom, a high-school teacher of history, who read a paper entitled "Exploring Local History." "All who like history, puzzles, and family trees; all who like to know the 'Why' of things; all who feel that the past has something worth remembering and handing down to future generations," should be fascinated by the game of exploring local history, Miss Gove suggested. In launching such exploration, she advised the reading of pioneer letters and other contemporary records. She told of her own studies of the work of the county commissioners of a given county, which called for investigation of the minutes of board meetings, newspaper files, and letters written by county officials in private hands or in the historical society, and also involved interviews with pioneer board members or their descendants. Exploring without recording its results she considered of relatively little value. Hence she urged local history students to write up what they have discovered and to file their manuscripts in some library for future reference. The chairman pointed out that the exploration of local his-

tory almost invariably results in the discovery of new materials such as letters and diaries and in the recording of reminiscences that give vivid pictures of the past.

The Reverend Mathias Savs of Shakopee, speaking on "The Historical Backgrounds of the Shakopee Region," then welcomed the visitors to Shakopee and asserted that early explorers considered the region between Mendota and Shakopee as the garden spot of Minnesota. The town of Shakopee, he explained, was named for the Indian chief whose village of about three hundred Indians was formerly located about two miles from its site. Father Savs gave a brief history of the churches and business enterprises of Shakopee and the places of special historical interest in the neighborhood, particularly the Faribault House. Before the meeting adjourned, the chairman introduced the Honorable Samuel R. Van Sant to the audience, which rose and applauded the former governor, pioneer steamboat captain, and lumberman, who notwithstanding his four score and ten years had braved the heat and exertion of the day's tour.

The tourists now started for Minneapolis, but made a detour in order to visit the log cabin built in 1847 by Oliver Faribault, a pioneer fur-trader. Many in the party, like pioneer travelers, quaffed water from the famous Faribault spring, which is situated at the bottom of a little ravine, near which the foundations of the house used by Samuel Pond as a mission station are still visible.

The tour then led to Lake Harriet in Minneapolis, where the Ponds ministered to the Indians in the thirties. On the shores of this lake the tourists ate a picnic supper, from which they were summoned to the band stand by the martial music of the Third Infantry Band from Fort Snelling. About two thousand people gathered on benches in front of the band stand and listened to the "Pond Centennial Program" that followed. It was arranged by the Hennepin County Historical Committee, of which Mr. Gale was chairman. Chief Chibiabos in a colorful native costume sang

several Indian songs and then introduced Professor George A. Pond of the University of Minnesota, a grandson of Samuel Pond. A similar greeting between a red man and his white brothers took place a hundred years ago, Professor Pond reminded the audience, when Chief Cloudman of the Lake Calhoun band of Sioux greeted the two Pond brothers, the first white men to take up their residence within the area of the present city of Minneapolis. Professor Pond as a representative of an association of descendants of these two men then introduced Dr. Blegen, whose address was an appraisal of the contributions of the Pond brothers. It appears in full elsewhere in the present issue of the magazine.

Dr. Clair E. Ames of Minneapolis then spoke briefly on the religious motive of the Pond brothers, pointing out that, firm in the belief that God had sent them to be missionaries to the Sioux, they were not deterred by the difficulty of learning the Indian language, their faith never failed, and their courage never faltered. In tribute to the Pond brothers and their contributions to the state of Minnesota, a shower of roses was scattered by an airplane flying over the audience while the band played the national anthem. This impressive scene concluded the convention.

Though a large number of persons living outside the Twin Cities attended the tour and convention, the majority came from that vicinity. The places that were visited—Fort Snelling, Mendota, Shakopee, and Lake Harriet—were probably familiar to them, but as the *St. Paul Dispatch* editor suggested, the “peripatetic history class” did much to “invest them with renewed interest and recall more intensely the significance that surrounds these neighborhood historic shrines.”



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