

THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1934¹

The state planning board is unquestionably right in its view that Minnesota has come of age. The characteristic note in the social and economic development of the last quarter century has been transition. The day of pioneer youth has passed and middle age is at hand. The marks of maturity are discernible not only in problems of adjustment that challenge current political and economic statesmanship, but also in a new emphasis upon planning, upon co-operation, and upon the organization of knowledge.

The activities of the Minnesota Historical Society in 1934 reflect something of this contemporary emphasis. They reveal a purpose to equip Minnesota with the "essential materials of state reference." Vast collections of records have been built up. Steadily and persistently they are being enlarged. The new day, however, calls for guides to these records; more adequate catalogues; inventories of archives; bibliographies of newspapers; analytical indexes to picture collections; more calendars and better indexes to manuscripts; state-wide surveys of historical materials preserved by local societies, schools, libraries, business concerns, and private individuals. It calls for union lists of holdings by various libraries and institutions in such a metropolitan district as the Twin Cities and for co-operation in planning that will eliminate unnecessary duplication of effort. It calls for the extension of local history organization to all the counties of the state, regional co-operation of such societies, and a close and sympathetic entente with the state society. It calls for the enlistment of many organiza-

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tions and individuals in collecting and research projects. It calls for the utilization of scientific equipment and methods in making available materials that are now widely scattered and inaccessible. While measurable progress has been made in the direction of such objectives, the society has also pressed forward on well-marked paths, never forgetting the importance of the three-fold task of collecting and preserving the historical records of Minnesota; efficiently administering those records and serving the public; and carrying Minnesota history to the people in a democratic program of education.

On no less than four occasions during the year the society has sponsored historical sessions and programs. The eighty-fifth annual meeting, held on January 8, attracted large audiences to its quartet of sessions, which set a high standard by the quality of the talks and papers given. The annual address was a survey of the westward advance of the printing press by Mr. Douglas C. McMurtrie, the leading authority on that subject. The twelfth summer convention, which was tucked into the one day of July 14, exploited the interest of "neighborhood historic shrines." Its sessions opened at old Fort Snelling, continued at the Sibley estate in Mendota and at the Minnesota Valley town of Shakopee, and closed at Lake Harriet, where nearly two thousand people assembled to honor the contributions of the Pond brothers to Minnesota's development. At a special meeting in October Mrs. Maud Hart Lovelace, the author of *One Stayed at Welcome* and other Minnesota novels, shared with a large audience some of her adventures in historical research; and late in the same month the society arranged a luncheon program commemorating the one-hundredth anniversary of the arrival at Mendota of Henry Hastings Sibley, commonwealth builder. These meetings, which had state-wide reverberations, did not a little to forward historical understanding.

The society's active membership a year ago was 1,385; today it is 1,386. During the year, 117 new members have been enrolled (as compared with 66 in 1933) and one reinstated, but unfortunately this gain has been offset by the deaths of 48 members and the withdrawal of 69. A net increase of one compares favorably, however, with the situation in 1933, when there was a net loss of 88. In a word, the society's membership has held its own during 1934. The number of subscribing schools and libraries has been reduced from 184 to 181; but the institutional membership has advanced from 28 to 35. Active and institutional members and subscribers reach, in all, the not unimpressive total of 1,602. The society is sustained by the interest and cooperation of this membership. By the same token it should be able to reach hundreds of historically interested people throughout the state who doubtless would be glad to join, if invited. Here is an opportunity for members to aid in promoting the vitality and stability of the society.

A significant editorial enterprise of the year has been the completion of a guide to the society's collections of personal papers—that vast treasure house of letters, diaries, reminiscences, account books, and other personal manuscript records collected through more than eight long decades. The guide lists and describes more than 450 separate collections, comprising hundreds of thousands of items, and it is being indexed with care. It is a key to one of America's great manuscript collections, but it is more than a key. It is a report to the world on the scope and value of that collection. If anyone labors under the misapprehension that little has been accomplished in collecting and preserving Minnesota's historical records, he should prepare himself for a shock. This guide will tell him of priceless collections of letters, diaries, and other records left by Ramsey, Sibley, Dr. Folwell, Knute Nelson, Bishop Whipple, Donnelly, Taliaferro, and hundreds of other Minnesotans. It

will describe personal manuscript collections of explorers, senators, governors, legislators, lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, geologists, bankers, millers, missionaries, ministers, merchants, farmers, yea, even blacksmiths and shoemakers—all makers of Minnesota. It will point to significant material on nearly every aspect of the state's history—politics, social and economic life, wars, transportation, business, religion, professional activity, and the like. In time we may hope to have similar guides to other classes of material in the society's manuscript division; to manuscript collections preserved in other parts of the state; and to Minnesota's newspapers, territorial documents, periodicals, fiction, and other important groups of records.

The society's most notable publication of the year was *Crusader and Feminist: Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm*, edited by Arthur J. Larsen, the newspaper librarian, and issued as the second in the series of *Narratives and Documents*. By means of a sprightly series of letters written from 1858 to 1865, the volume portrays conditions and events in Minnesota and the nation as viewed by an editor, author, lecturer, antislavery agitator, fighter for women's rights, and war nurse, all one and the same person, whose biography, written with skill and discernment, is supplied by Mr. Larsen in the guise of an introduction. Early reviews hail the work as an interesting and revealing contribution to state and national history. MINNESOTA HISTORY, the society's quarterly magazine, completed its fifteenth volume in 1934, publishing in its four issues more than twenty articles and many book reviews. What manner of pabulum the magazine offers may be indicated by noting that its articles ranged in subject matter from geology, archaeology, and Indian contributions to civilization, to frontier home conditions, the story of American printing, old Fort Snelling, the westward movement, and the chronicle of a New-World Bohemia. Contributors included such scholars and

writers as Mr. McMurtrie, Louise Phelps Kellogg, Guy Stanton Ford, and Charles M. Flandrau. Seventy brief historical articles and news items have been supplied to the press of the state through twelve issues of the *Minnesota Historical News*; and a publication of increasing utility to officials and librarians, the quarterly *Check List of Minnesota Public Documents*, was brought out regularly.

The collections of the society—library, manuscript, and museum—do not, like Topsy, just grow. They are built up, as was pointed out last year, by planning, vigilance, and persistent work. The interest and good will of the public, as stimulated by the varied activities of the society, play, however, an important part in the success of the collecting program. Last year, for example, fifty-nine per cent of the books added to the library were received as gifts, in most instances solicited by letter. The total number, including accessioned pamphlets and bound newspaper volumes, was 2,903; and the size of the library advanced to 181,550 items. Currently received periodicals numbered 1,210, of which the amazing number of 572 are being published in Minnesota. Newspapers to the number of 530 were currently filed and the older collection was enhanced in value by gifts of files of *Finance and Commerce*, the *Minnesota Volksfreund* of Jordan, the *Remer Record*, *Duluth Posten*, and a number of early Swedish-American temperance papers. An interesting development of the year was the establishment of a memorial collection of genealogical books in honor of the late Mrs. Marshall Coolidge of Minneapolis by the Monument chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Not a bronze tablet or a shaft of marble, but a collection of books, to be augmented year by year, each volume containing an appropriate bookplate—is not that an interesting, useful, and permanent kind of monument? Already some fourteen or fifteen volumes have been presented to the society for this special collection. Thanks

to the unwearying interest and work of Dr. Francis L. Palmer, notable progress has been made in building up the Seabury-Tanner collection and related groups of Episcopalian church material. Among hundreds of additions to the society's library in general fields, only two will be mentioned: a copy of Radisson's *Voyages* and one of the *Flower Queen*, a rare pamphlet that was published at Hastings in 1857.

The society's manuscripts have been enriched by 146 accessions of material, not a few of them consisting of extensive groups of letters and of diaries. By way of illustrating their interest and diversity, mention may be made of an original letter of George Washington; a collection of letters written by the Pond brothers, missionaries to the Sioux Indians; more than a hundred letters from the early sixties by George S. Biscoe, a home missionary at Cottage Grove; a diary kept in 1857 by Benjamin Densmore, including entries made on a surveying trip in Otter Tail County; a series of agricultural diaries kept by John Q. A. Nickerson at Elk River from 1864 to 1915; a diary kept by John E. Rise-dorph at Le Sueur from 1875 to 1877; the reminiscences of Everett W. Foster, who settled in Wabasha County in 1858; an early St. Paul diary kept by Chandler Adams; the business records of two lumber companies in the St. Croix Valley; the papers of Oscar Firkins, noted teacher, dramatic critic, and author; and ten boxes of correspondence of the Nonpartisan League from 1916 to 1923. A series of fascinating unpublished diaries kept by the Sage of Nininger has been added to the Donnelly Papers. Through the year the society has used a Leica camera to make available to Minnesotans materials preserved outside the state. Thus filmslides have been obtained of more than ten thousand pages of Minnesota letters and reports in the archives of the American Home Missionary Society at Chicago; of more than a thousand pages of reports by early Minnesota

agents of the McCormick Harvester Machine Company, the originals of which are preserved at Chicago in the McCormick Library; and of a variety of fur trade and other frontier materials preserved at Topeka, Iowa City, and Galena. A hundred transcripts have been made of Minnesota letters and reports published in eastern newspapers. The society has continued to receive calendar cards for Minnesota materials in the federal archives, particularly the war department and the Indian office.

The society continues to build up its museum as a visual historical representation of the development of life in Minnesota and the Northwest. The general collection was increased by 633 objects of historical, archaeological, ethnological, and numismatic interest. The picture collection, to which 1,889 items were added, now contains a total of 47,913, of which a little less than half are portraits. The collection of negatives grew by 256 items; and the slide collection, with 176 additions in 1934, now numbers 1,502. A few pictures and portraits recently added possess unusual interest. Twenty-one oil portraits of Minnesota governors were transferred from the Capitol to the society's custody and have transformed the society's auditorium into a Hall of Governors. Oil paintings by Henry Lewis of Fort Crawford and Prairie du Chien and a number of interesting oil sketches by the same artist have been presented by the T. B. Walker Foundation of Minneapolis. From an English dealer the society has obtained a remarkable collection of thirty-seven water-color sketches of Minnesota and Northwest scenes by the well-known artist Edwin Whitefield. An interesting painting of Fort Snelling about 1850 is the gift of Mr. W. W. Cutler of St. Paul. Oil portraits of Colonel and Mrs. Hans Mattson, received from Mr. Edgar Mattson of Minneapolis, are also of special interest. The society received a large framed steel engraving of General Lee from the Minnesota Robert E. Lee chapter of the

United Daughters of the Confederacy, an appreciated addition to its gallery of great Americans.

Wholehearted co-operation with the Civil Works and Federal Emergency Relief administrations has made the society the scene of extraordinary activity through much of the year. The start was modest enough—eight CWA workers who, beginning in December, 1933, completed an inventory of non-Minnesota newspapers in the society's collection, mounted some two thousand pictures on muslin, transcribed manuscripts, began the preparation of a subject index to the picture collection, pushed forward the society's project for a bibliography and inventory of Minnesota newspapers, and did sundry special library tasks. In due time three persons undertook an inventory and report on the Catholic Historical Society materials preserved at the St. Paul Seminary. In the last three weeks of the CWA, however, the society directed eighty-five additional workers in the most ambitious piece of field work it has ever attempted. This was nothing less than an inventory of the county archives of Minnesota and a report upon their administration and condition, a gigantic task that had been begun some twenty years ago by a field worker who surveyed the archival contents of sixteen courthouses. Now investigators were sent to the remaining seventy-one counties; one resurveyed the archives in one of the original sixteen counties; a worker was put in the state archives; and a squad of regional supervisors, under the general direction of Dr. Nute, saw that the work was done efficiently. The personnel was of good quality and excellent results were obtained, though it was possible to complete the inventories in only a few counties. At the end of March, all the society's CWA projects came to an abrupt close. Late in August, however, an FERA project was set in motion, starting with thirteen workers and soon expanding to seventeen. This has concentrated upon the Minnesota newspaper bibliogra-

phy, the subject index to the picture collection, a union list of Minnesota newspaper holdings which will go into a national list sponsored by the Bibliographical Society of America, the transcribing of manuscripts, and various special library undertakings. Meanwhile, the FERA authorities have approved a plan for resumption on a modest scale of the archives survey. Mention should also be made of the employment under the FERA of an artist who has completed a bust of Alexander Faribault, founder of the city of Faribault. While all these projects have been going on, the society has also co-operated with the Historic American Buildings Survey and has acquired a set of its admirable drawings of selected Minnesota buildings; with Twin City librarians in a survey of important reference works in this area and in the compiling of a union list of serials in Minneapolis and St. Paul institutions; and with the University of Minnesota in an archaeological project directed by Dr. Jenks

Few of the society's special undertakings hold more promise of useful results than the newspaper bibliography, the archives survey, and the picture index. The bibliography, under Mr. Larsen's direction, has been reorganized from the bottom up; editors and librarians the state over have been called into co-operation; most of the holdings of the society and the entire American newspaper collections of the University of Minnesota and the Minneapolis Public Library have been inventoried. The union list, directed by Miss Krausnick as a closely related piece of work, is also well under way. This systematization of information about newspapers and newspaper files in Minnesota recently caused an important newspaper to call upon the entire state to give the project close co-operation. The archives survey is yielding a mass of information not only of historical but also of administrative significance and the society is determined to complete it. The analytical index of pictures,

for which nearly seven thousand cards already have been written, is an original enterprise the progress of which is being watched by museum administrators throughout the country.

Notwithstanding the burden of special projects, there has been no abatement in the quiet routine of administering the collections, handling incoming materials, and serving the public. In the library 2,683 items were catalogued, 18,299 cards were added to the various card index files, and many of the old handwritten cards were removed. The new card mimeograph has been a boon to the society, which is more nearly up to date in the typing and mimeographing of cards than ever before. Emphasis has been placed upon the cataloguing and recataloguing of items of special Minnesota interest. The listing of the Torrance Civil War collection of five thousand books and pamphlets is virtually completed. The biographical index has been enlarged by 1,537 entries. A simple author and subject index to the unaccessioned pamphlets, which total about 3,500, may solve a deferred catalogue problem that has presented complex difficulties. In the manuscript division the Torrance, Folwell, Pond, Davidson, Winchell, Upham, and other collections have been arranged; the Whipple diary and many other documents have been transcribed; a calendar has been made of the film slides from the American Home Missionary Society archives; there has been considerable cataloguing under the new manuscript classification; a wide net has been cast in the effort to bring in new and important groups of manuscripts; and experiment with Leica photography has been continued by making additions to equipment and improving methods. Thirty-three special exhibits have been arranged by the museum; a remarkable visual representation of the story of Minnesota geology, planned and made by Mr. Donald K. Lewis of Red Wing, has been installed; the picture collection has been renovated and many new

pictures have been placed on display throughout the building; some additional filing units and walnut cases have been purchased; and of course the routine of classifying new museum objects has been pursued. All these things and many others that cannot be mentioned in a brief report are fundamental and make for an efficient institution.

Who can measure or appraise the use that is made of the society's collections? Statistics have only a limited value, for it must be remembered that one person may come on a merely casual visit while another may find and use here the basic materials for a significant history or novel or address or article. Still, it may be of interest to note that during the year the society has received 32,000 visitors in its museum and served 4,025 patrons of its general library, 1,960 readers of its newspapers, and 480 users of its manuscripts. Among frequent users have been scholars and students, business men, lawyers, journalists, novelists, genealogists, architects, and state officials. Not Minnesota alone, but seventeen other states and such distant lands as Australia, New Zealand, Wales, and Norway were represented among the library's patrons; and the scope of their inquiries was so wide that it defies description. The secretary of war, Mr. Dern, found time to spend a half hour at the society on a recent visit to St. Paul.

The society ended last spring an interesting experiment in the promotion of popular appreciation of state history. Its radio history of Minnesota, broadcast from the university station, was carried to the eve of the present, and the series as a whole, launched in 1932 and preserved in more than fifty articles published in the *Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, ranges over the entire field of state history from the French regime to Minnesota yesterdays. Various members of the staff are now participating in a new radio series, sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution, on Minnesota historic sites. Throughout the year staff mem-

bers have responded to more than eighty requests for talks and papers on Minnesota history and allied subjects. These have been presented chiefly before groups in the Twin Cities, but they have included also such organizations as the American Association of Museums, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, the Minnesota Academy of Science, and the Minnesota library and education associations. The pressure of many special projects prevented an intensive exploitation of the highway marking project during the year, but the number of historical inscriptions submitted to the highway department was increased from eighty-eight to ninety-seven. The "Information Bureau," now virtually synonymous with the reference librarian, handled 376 inquiries by mail during 1934 in addition to a host of questions by telephone and at the main library desk. The inquiries by letter came chiefly from Minnesota, but thirty-five other states and two foreign countries were represented.

Notwithstanding the perils of prophecy, the prediction was offered a year ago that every county in the state would have in due time an organized local historical society. It looks as if that prediction is coming true. At all events, six new county historical societies and one regional society were launched in the state in 1934, and organization is pending in at least a half dozen additional counties. The movement for the local organization of historical work, sponsored by the state society, was begun in 1922; in the intervening thirteen years no fewer than forty-three local societies have been started in Minnesota. Most of them are active, have competent leadership, attract members, hold meetings, collect records, and in various ways stimulate local historical interest; some have established museums; and some are co-operating regionally. The state society keeps in constant and intimate touch with the local organizations and watches with deep interest the work they are doing to promote understanding and appreciation of com-

munity backgrounds. That work stirs the imagination as one ponders its meaning in terms of community culture. It is gratifying to note also that the Catholic Historical Society of St. Paul, so handsomely revived in 1933, expanded its activities in 1934 and issued the second of its new and excellent series of yearbooks, *Acta et Dicta*.

Among many special activities of staff members, reflecting their professional interests, which can only be alluded to in this report, are the compilation by Miss Fawcett of a list of recent Minnesota books and pamphlets; the completion by Miss Jerabek of a bibliographical check list of Minnesota territorial documents; the progress of Miss Ingram on a bibliography of Minnesota fiction; the revision by Mrs. Warming of the Minnesota section in the *Statesman's Yearbook*; the appointment of Miss Krausnick as chairman of the Minnesota section for the national union list of newspapers; Miss Wheelhouse's study of Goodhue and the *Minnesota Pioneer*; an investigation by Miss Heilbron of the history of organized sports in Minnesota; an essay by Mr. Larsen on early Dakota newspapers; the doctoral dissertation by Mr. Gates on the treaty of Ghent; Miss Nordin's co-operation with the curator of the museum in supervising the compilation of the picture index; Mrs. Larsen's search in early American magazines for the frontier writings of Sibley; the enterprise of Miss Ackermann in manuscript field trips; and Mr. Babcock's essay on Minnesota Indian life and his presentation of a paper at the annual meeting of the American Association of Museums. The superintendent has completed, in collaboration with Professor Ruud, the editing of a volume of emigrant songs and ballads; and has written a pamphlet on Lincoln and European opinion, an article surveying historical society work in the Mississippi Valley, and several sketches for the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

The strenuous and varied activities of the society as pic-

tured in the present report have been made possible by an efficient, hard-working, and co-operative staff. Under a reduced budget and with lessened salaries, they have put increased impetus into their work, eager only to do their jobs well. Though paying tribute to the entire staff, I shall permit myself to mention by name Mr. Babcock, who, in addition to conducting his division, has arranged the society's meetings, given more than forty papers and talks, published several articles, aided in organizing emergency and relief work projects, interested himself in county historical organization, and devoted attention to the society's membership work. The executive council at its April meeting elected Mr. Dillon J. O'Brien, Mr. Nathaniel Langford, and Mrs. Edward B. Young to fill the places made vacant by the deaths of James M. McConnell, Harold Harris, and Dr. Warren Upham. Two members of the council have recently won high distinction in national historical circles, Mr. Shippee through his election to the presidency of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, and Dean Ford through his election to the second vice presidency of the American Historical Association, which signifies his elevation two years hence to the presidency of the association, the highest honor that can be won by an American historian.

The society rejoices in the distinction and rich opportunity given Dr. Nute through her winning of a fellowship of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation of New York for a year's sojourn in Europe. She was granted a leave of absence for a year, beginning August 15, and has already spent fruitful months of research in London, particularly in the archives of the Hudson's Bay Company, working on a joint biography of Radisson and Groseilliers. Later she expects to study in France and perhaps other countries. Her book will be awaited with high expectations by all who are interested in the fascinating international story of the two seventeenth-century Frenchmen. Mr. Charles M.

Gates, a graduate student of the University of Minnesota, took up the work of acting curator of manuscripts in mid-August. In December he was awarded the degree of doctor of philosophy by the university. A leave of absence for six months was granted Helen V. Richter, office stenographer, beginning May 1, and Gladys Heimes filled the temporary vacancy. Louise H. Blad, a highly competent catalogue-typist, resigned on December 1, and her position has been filled by the appointment of Elaine M. Perra. On January 29 Dr. Warren Upham, secretary of the society from 1895 to 1914, archaeologist from 1914 to 1933, and thereafter archaeologist emeritus, died in St. Paul at the age of eighty-four. His many services to the society and to the state will be commemorated in a memorial now in preparation. The society has already compiled a bibliography of his numerous writings.

In the budget for the biennium 1935-37 as approved by the executive committee and submitted to the budget commission, an attempt was made to meet the society's essential needs with due regard both for practical efficiency and for economy. Since the library is rapidly filling the stack space now available, it seemed wise to look toward the completion of bookstacks on floor B in the second year of the biennium, and a request for \$8,500 for this purpose was accordingly inserted. The problem of administering the archives collection has become increasingly serious with the passage of time, and it seemed desirable to request the establishment of the position of archives assistant at a modest salary. Beyond these two items, the budget has few exceptional features. The total requests for salaries and wages is \$32,460 per year and for supplies and expenses, \$18,000. The former will permit the establishment of the archives position and, in respect to the old positions, will restore the basic salaries as they were prior to the reductions required for a two-year period under the appropriations made by the

last legislature. What action will be taken by the legislature now in session is of course unknown, but it is gratifying to note that the budget commissioner and the governor, in their recommendations to the legislature, have substantially endorsed the society's requests.

In closing this survey, I return to the thought that Minnesota has attained maturity. The Minnesota Historical Society must meet the demands of an age that places a premium upon planning, organization, and co-operation. It must serve the needs of Minnesota. It must safeguard the fundamentals of collecting records, of administering them well, and of making history "serve a democratic role in the development of the community culture." It must be alert to the modern stress upon ways and means of making available and usable the masses of records collected. And it must continue to uphold faithfully high standards of professional competence and integrity.

THEODORE C. BLEGEN

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL



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