

THE STATE HISTORICAL CONVENTION OF 1935

The historic backgrounds of the Minnesota Valley from Traverse des Sioux to Lac qui Parle were exploited by the Minnesota Historical Society in its thirteenth state historical convention and summer tour, which took place from June 13 to 15. As a guide for those who traveled under the auspices of the society westward almost to the Dakota boundary and thence northeastward to Kandiyohi and McLeod counties on the return trip to the Twin Cities, a multigraphed sheet presenting "Glimpses of the History of the Route" was prepared. The tour began shortly after noon on Thursday, June 13, when a chartered bus carrying about twenty-five members and friends of the society left the Historical Building in St. Paul. At 2:00 P. M., at Shakopee, some half dozen private cars joined the tour; and by 3:45 P. M. about a hundred tourists had assembled at Traverse des Sioux State Park. There, on a site well known during the fur-trade era and famed as the place at which an important Sioux treaty was negotiated in 1851, the first session of the convention was held.

Mr. Henry N. Benson of St. Peter, president of the Nicollet County Historical Society, who presided, welcomed the visitors and then called upon Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the museum and archaeologist for the Minnesota Historical Society, for a paper on Louis Provençalle, a French-Canadian trader who had charge of a post at Traverse des Sioux from the middle twenties until his death in 1850. Mr. Babcock's account of the career of this picturesque frontiersman will appear in a future issue of MINNESOTA HISTORY. The story of "Old Traverse des Sioux" was reviewed by the next speaker, Dr. Conrad Peterson, professor of history in Gustavus Adolphus College at St. Peter.

He recalled explorers, such as Le Sueur and Carver, who visited the Minnesota Valley and he told of the Indian life that centered at the Traverse. At the conclusion of this talk, Mr. Benson introduced to the audience members of the families of two missionaries who ministered to the Minnesota Sioux—Mrs. Thomas L. Riggs of Oahe, South Dakota, a daughter-in-law of Stephen R. Riggs, and the Reverend and Mrs. Jesse P. Williamson and Mrs. Winifred W. Barton, grandchildren of Dr. Thomas S. Williamson. Colonel J. A. Lundeen, who received one of the earliest appointments to West Point from Minnesota, was called upon and made some remarks about frontier life. The meeting was then adjourned, and the tourists proceeded to St. Peter, driving past the cemetery in which Governor John A. Johnson is buried and through the campus of Gustavus Adolphus College. A garden party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Benson served as a delightful interlude in the day's program.

Following an informal dinner at the Hotel Nicollet, the evening session was convened in the Nicollet County Courthouse with Mr. William W. Cutler of St. Paul, president of the Minnesota Historical Society, presiding. Mr. Benson, the first speaker, told of local historical activity in Nicollet County and the work of the county historical society, which, he pointed out, grew out of an old settlers' association. "Changing Frontiers of the American West" was the subject chosen by the second speaker, Dr. Louis Pelzer, professor of history in the University of Iowa and president of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association. He described the "succession of frontiers" that were made by explorers, traders, missionaries, settlers, soldiers, miners, and boatmen; and he dwelt particularly upon the military frontier of the thirties and forties that "was made up of a long chain of forts and posts, from Fort Snelling on the north to Baton Rouge to the south." The final speaker of the session, Miss Mary Ellen Lewis of Lewisville, described a journey by

covered wagon through southern Minnesota in 1873, as recorded in a diary kept by Mrs. Jane Grout.

Members of the tour left St. Peter early on Friday morning, June 14, for between that place and Granite Falls they were scheduled to visit Fort Ridgely and Wood Lake, where important battles in the Sioux War of 1862 were fought, and the sites of the lower and upper Sioux agencies on the Minnesota River and of the mission stations near the upper agency where Dr. Thomas S. Williamson and Stephen R. Riggs were stationed before the outbreak of 1862. At Fort Ridgely, Mrs. E. R. Sheire, editor of the *Fairfax Standard*, sketched the history of the fort and distributed among members of the audience an illustrated leaflet on the same subject. A reception committee consisting of three members of the Granite Falls Commercial Club—Mr. H. S. Lampman, Mr. Jay L. Putnam, and Mr. C. R. Barthelemy—met the tourists just before they reached Wood Lake, now a state park, where they inspected a monument marking the site of the battle and listened to Mr. Charles Stees of St. Paul, a member of the executive council of the Minnesota Historical Society, read extracts from an interesting and valuable unpublished diary kept by his uncle, Captain Charles J. Stees, who participated in the conflict. The tourists reached the Granite Falls Congregational Church for a luncheon at 12:30 P. M. It was followed by a brief session, with Mr. Edward C. Gale of Minneapolis, vice president of the Minnesota Historical Society, presiding; Mr. Putnam, who is the editor of the *Granite Falls Tribune*, welcoming the visitors; Mr. Lampman outlining the "Historic Backgrounds of the Granite Falls Region"; and Mr. Fred W. Johnson of New Ulm, president of the Brown County Historical Society, reviewing the story of the Sioux reservation in the Minnesota Valley and of the agencies at the mouths of the Redwood and Yellow Medicine rivers.

The climax of the tour was reached on the afternoon of June 14 at Chippewa-Lac qui Parle Mission State Park,

where, in an outdoor amphitheater, with Dr. Lester B. Shippee, professor of history in the University of Minnesota, presiding, a session was held to commemorate the centennial of the founding by Dr. Thomas S. Williamson and Alexander Huggins of the Lac qui Parle mission. More than a thousand people heard Dr. Charles M. Gates, acting curator of manuscripts on the staff of the state historical society, relate the story of the mission, which was established on July 9, 1835, under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and which was continued for two decades as a center for mission work among the Minnesota Sioux. His paper appeared in full in the June issue of this magazine. The Indian tribe that the Lac qui Parle missionaries served was represented by the Reverend Philip Frazier, who is superintendent of Congregational mission work at Fort Pierre, South Dakota. He spoke on "Gospel for the Modern Sioux," presenting the story of the contact of red men and white from the Indian's point of view. The relations of traders, soldiers, and missionaries with the Sioux were described by the speaker, who showed how churches and schools developed after 1862. At the conclusion of his address, he introduced the Reverend Reuben Kitto, a Congregational missionary at Thunder Butte, South Dakota, who greeted the audience in his native Dakota tongue. A group of vocal selections by the Montevideo Choral Club was another feature of this program.¹

Following a dinner at the Montevideo Congregational Church, about three hundred people gathered in the Mon-

¹ The papers presented by Mr. Gates and Mr. Frazier appear in full in the "Lac qui Parle Centennial Edition" of the *Montevideo News*, published on July 5, and that by Mr. Gates is also published in the *Montevideo American* of the same date. A celebration sponsored by the Congregational and Presbyterian churches was held at Lac qui Parle on July 7, and another arranged by the Lac qui Parle Indian Mission Centennial Commission created by the 1935 legislature was staged on July 9. On the latter date the Minnesota Historical Society was represented by Mr. Babcock, who spoke on "Cross and Plough: The Missionary as a Civilizer." An account of these celebrations will appear in the December issue of this magazine.

tevideo Armory to listen to a concert by the local municipal band and to a series of talks. Mr. Babcock presided, calling first upon Mr. C. E. Mills of Montevideo for a talk on "Early Days in Lac qui Parle County." He was followed by Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, who took as his subject "Conserving Minnesota's Past." The state society "for a dozen years," he said, "has been laying particular stress upon the significance of local history, and has been exploiting the backgrounds of various regions in its annual summer tours" and in the encouragement of the county historical society movement. He expressed the hope that in the near future active historical societies would exist in Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, and Yellow Medicine counties. Mr. Ludwig I. Roe, editor of the *Montevideo News*, concluded the session with a talk on the backgrounds of Chippewa County. He remarked upon the fact that Minnesota is made up of sections with differing characteristics, and he stressed the importance of the study of local and regional history and of recent history. His ideas are expanded in an editorial in his newspaper for June 14 entitled "Now Is History," in which he points out that "Organized interest can save the every-day records and articles that make it possible for the trained historian to construct an accurate picture. This may be through a county historical society, or by community groups."

Dr. Blegen presided at the opening session of the third day of the convention, which was held jointly with the Kandiyohi County Old Settlers Association at the fair grounds at Willmar. "Hunting in Minnesota in the Seventies" was the subject chosen by the first speaker, Miss Mary Wheelhouse, editorial assistant on the staff of the historical society, whose paper appears elsewhere in this issue of MINNESOTA HISTORY. "Local History Work in Kandiyohi County" was discussed briefly by Senator Victor E. Lawson, who told of the organization of the old settlers association in 1897 and of the building of its log cabin, in which the

session was held, and by Dr. A. F. Branton, who described the historical work that is being conducted under the auspices of the American Legion. Following this talk, Dr. Blegen introduced to the audience former Governor Samuel R. Van Sant of Minneapolis, who spoke briefly. An interesting paper entitled "Chippewa Falls, a Pre-Railroad Business Center," by Barr Moses, editor of the *Springfield* [Ohio] *Sun*, was then read, in the absence of the author, by Mr. Babcock. It told the story of a community on the Chippewa River, where in 1870 three Canadians, including Mr. Moses' father, established a mill. Chippewa Falls enjoyed a brief period of prosperity, and "at times during the busy season the mill ran day and night." By 1883, however, according to Mr. Moses, "the lack of rail facilities and competition of large Minneapolis mills had definitely ended the business prosperity of the place forever." The chairman, following the paper, stated that it was a part of an unpublished book giving a full-length picture of a Minnesota frontier community. He pointed out that too often pioneer reminiscences are in the form of fragments dealing with episodes and that there is need of comprehensive narratives such as that prepared by Mr. Moses. Dr. Blegen then called upon Senator Lawson to introduce Mr. Andrew Larson of Willmar, a Minnesota pioneer and Civil War veteran, who responded with a greeting to the audience. At the conclusion of the session, the visitors repaired to the local Presbyterian Church, where luncheon was served and where the minister, the Reverend W. L. Cain, gave a short address on the pioneer Presbyterian church.

A committee of the Kandiyohi County Old Settlers Association, which met the tourists as they entered the county in the morning, now took charge of the historical pilgrimage for its progress from Willmar to Rosendale, where it entered Meeker County. A special printed program distributed among the tourists included sketches of points of historical interest along the route, and these in turn had

been marked with numbered "standards." Among the places thus designated were the site in the beautiful Kandiyohi lakes region proposed for the Minnesota capital in bills introduced in the legislatures of 1861, 1869, and 1872, and the spot where Captain John S. Cady was killed by an Indian in 1863.

From the Kandiyohi County boundary the historical tourists proceeded to Glencoe, where they witnessed an open-air pageant of pioneer life in McLeod County staged by the historical societies of Glencoe and Hutchinson. Refreshments were first served in the public school building and then the visitors proceeded to a grandstand, where they were welcomed in a talk by Mr. S. S. Beach of Hutchinson, to which President Cutler responded. Miss Helen M. Baker of Brownston then spoke briefly on pioneer education. Following this, the pageant was presented before an audience of approximately fifteen hundred people. In the various episodes, pioneer activities, such as the building of a log cabin and the harvesting of crops with primitive implements, were illustrated; frontier events, such as the arrival of the first settlers in covered wagons and the coming of members of the Hutchinson family, were re-enacted; and scenes suggesting various special aspects of the history of the region, such as the development of a co-operative creamery and the social life of a Bohemian settlement, were presented.

As this colorful pageant drew to a close, a mounted scout galloped by in a cloud of dust, shouting a shrill warning that the Indians were coming and that everyone must make haste and depart. The tourists and audience took the courier at his word, and so the peripatetic convention ended.² Thudding hoofs gave way to purring motors as the chartered bus and private cars of the tour headed, late Saturday afternoon, June 15, for the Twin Cities.

² Another account of the convention and tour is contributed by Gertrude Gove to the *Windom Reporter*, where it appears in two installments on June 21 and 28.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).