

THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1935

Like most other institutions, the Minnesota Historical Society has need of an annual review, made from a broad perspective, of its many and varied activities. There is a swirl of day-by-day work; we confront an endless procession of problems, little and big; the worthwhile tasks that we cannot tackle sometimes darken our immediate horizon; we try to look ahead and to work out plans for the future; and now and then, to employ the words of a popular song, things seem to go "round and round." A survey of what has actually been accomplished over a twelvemonth period tends to clear the air. Details fit into large patterns; one activity is seen to have an organic relation to another; sometimes we are astonished to see how much progress there has been; and in the end our larger purposes and objectives stand out clearly.

The society has sponsored historical sessions and programs on four occasions during the year. The eighty-sixth annual meeting, held on January 21, was well attended in all its sessions and reached a climax in an annual address delivered by Professor Albert E. Jenks on "Recent Discoveries in Minnesota Prehistory." In the spring, on April 16, about two hundred persons assembled for the presentation of "An Animated Map of Canada" by Dr. Lawrence J. Burpee, the noted Canadian historian. The thirteenth annual summer convention, unlike that of 1934, which was limited to one day and exploited neighborhood historic shrines, was a full-length tour, with stops and programs at no fewer than nine places. It was held from June 13 to 15 and focused attention upon the history of the Minnesota Valley from old Traverse des Sioux to Lac qui Parle. The return to the Twin Cities was by way of Willmar and Glen-

coe. The Lac qui Parle session, which celebrated the centennial of the founding of an important Indian mission at that place, attracted an audience of more than a thousand people. The final meeting of the year was held on October 21, when a large audience heard Dr. Grace Lee Nute tell of her sleuth-like adventures in England and France in "Tracking Down the First French Explorers of Minnesota."

During the year the society has enrolled 89 new members, but unfortunately this gain has been more than offset by the deaths of 55 members and the withdrawal of 50, so that the active membership today is 1,370 as compared with 1,386 a year ago. Regrettable as is even this slight loss, it is evident that the membership has substantially held its own, and it is encouraging to note that in December alone 26 new members were enrolled. The number of subscribing schools and libraries has increased from 181 to 186 and the institutional membership from 35 to 42. Active and institutional members and subscribers reach a grand total of 1,598. As compared with most historical societies in the country, this is a somewhat impressive figure, but I believe that hundreds of Minnesotans not now affiliated with the society could easily be persuaded to join through the quiet efforts of the present membership. No spectacular campaign is desired, but I call upon interested members to give the kind of effort here suggested and thus contribute to the strengthening of the society and its work.

The society's quarterly magazine, MINNESOTA HISTORY, completed its sixteenth volume in 1935. With more than twenty articles, numerous reviews, and other items, including an index, the issues will make up a volume of well over five hundred pages. No fewer than thirty-six authors, including Professor H. Hale Bellot of London, Stanley Vestal of Oklahoma, and Professor A. E. Jenks of Minnesota, have contributed to these pages. The articles range in subject matter from Minnesota prehistory and problems of the French regime to such themes as frontier holidays, Indian

missions, hunting and wild life, and the survival of folk songs among immigrant people of the state, with a distinct tendency toward the exploitation of social and cultural history. For some reason the magazine recently has attracted more comments than usual from readers and users. "I go through the quarterly minutely," writes Professor Paxson of California, "always getting much out of it, and noting the way you are digging in to the life of things." Professor Schlesinger of Harvard offers this opinion, "I place MINNESOTA HISTORY in the front rank of American historical periodicals." And to Dean Ford one issue of the magazine gave "a vivid picture of an astonishing and varied interest in the society and in state and local history."

The *Guide to the Personal Papers* in the society's manuscript collections, published early in 1935, has met with a cordial response from other historical societies and libraries and from scholars. Most of the comments emphasize its utility as a possible model for similar publications by other institutions. Dr. Solon J. Buck, director of publications for the National Archives, goes so far as to characterize it as "the most adequate thing of the sort that has ever been published in this country." In the same series of bulletins, the society's rules for *Copying Manuscripts*, as worked out in the manuscript division in the last decade and a half, have been made available to the scholarly world. A much needed bibliography of Minnesota territorial documents, compiled by Esther Jerabek, is now in press. Other editorial enterprises under way include a volume of Red River Valley missionary documents, a bibliography of the writings of Warren Upham, a check list of Minnesota fiction, a guide to the society's collection of the records of organizations and institutions, a selection of the writings of James M. Goodhue, and the diary of Henry Lewis, frontier panoramist and traveler. During the year more than sixty short historical articles and news items have been furnished to the press through the twelve numbers of the *Minnesota Historical*

News; and the service to officials and libraries represented by the quarterly *Check List of Minnesota Public Documents* has been continued.

As the wide-reaching activities of the society become better known and appreciated throughout the state, they yield rich fruits for the society's program of collecting and preserving library, manuscript, and museum materials. The fruit does not gather itself, however, and the staff must plan and work with unwearying vigilance, sending out thousands of letters and requests and systematizing its efforts. In 1935 the library was enriched by the addition of 3,656 books, pamphlets, and newspaper volumes—and sixty-one per cent of this number were gifts. Five years ago the library contained 171,000 items; a year ago it counted 181,550; today the figure is 185,206. Currently received periodicals total 1,268, of which 605 are published in Minnesota; and the society is filing 551 current newspapers, 481 of which are published in Minnesota. An extraordinary gift of the past year was a collection of more than three hundred volumes of German-language newspapers received from the National Weeklies of Winona, a firm that represents the consolidation of nearly fifty German papers previously published in various parts of the United States and Canada. This gift, consisting of files accumulated in the long processes of consolidation, will give new importance to the society's materials for the study of the German element in America. Another interesting acquisition is a series of Nonpartisan League newspapers, including files of the league's state publications in Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Idaho. Among scores and even hundreds of interesting general library accessions, only three will be mentioned here: a copy of the rare first edition, in Swedish, of Pehr Kalm's "Travels into North America"; a priceless collection of pamphlets originally collected by Governor Alexander Ramsey; and a file of the *Lutheran Church Quarterly*, running from 1849 to 1934. A number

of organizations interested in building up special collections of material in the society's library have continued their activity in this generous cause during the past year.

There is something stirring, even dramatic, about the growth of the society's collection of manuscripts—unique records saved for the uses of present and future historians. During the past year 186 accessions of manuscripts were received, an increase of forty over those for 1934. Sixty-five accessions came in the last three months of 1935, a larger number than has been received during any previous quarter in the history of the society. The new manuscript materials are varied in subject matter and excellent in quality. They include a diary and a large collection of letters of Joseph A. Wheelock, pioneer journalist; the papers of Clarence H. Eckles and Dean Alfred Owre, two notable figures in American professional education, one in agriculture and dairying, the other in dentistry; about fifty letters written to Emil Oberhoffer, for two decades conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra; and additions to the papers of such men as Alexander Ramsey, Minnesota's first territorial governor, the Pond brothers, pioneer missionaries, Frederick Leavenworth, frontier surveyor, and Benjamin Densmore, prominent figure in Red Wing and state pioneer history. Negotiations with Mrs. Lind for the acquisition of the papers of Governor John Lind reached a head just after the close of the year, and the society, thanks to Mrs. Lind's public spirit, has now received this collection, which takes rank as one of the most significant groups of papers in its possession.

New manuscript items of special interest are so many that they defy even listing in the present report. Notable is the original manuscript of Bishop Baraga's Ojibway grammar, recently received from England. Newly acquired diaries—day-by-day mirrors of events and thoughts—include, either as originals or as transcripts, those of Daniel M. Storer of Shakopee, extending from 1849 to 1905; of Zina

M. Chase, picturing social life at Stillwater in the sixties; of Robert Watson, recording a trip up the Mississippi from Galena to St. Paul in 1850; and of Major Ebenezer O. Rice, telling of the Sully expedition to the plains in 1864. Reminiscences include those of Andrus R. Merritt, one of the "seven iron men" of Mesabi fame, and of David M. Fyffe, a Scot who came to America in 1882 as the manager of the American Land and Colonization Company of Scotland. Among numerous records of organizations may be mentioned those of a Turnverein over a sixty-year period, the charter and minutes of a local Minnesota grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, and the minutes of a county medical society. Additions to the archives of the Minnesota diocese of the Protestant Episcopal church include two account books and two scrapbooks kept by Bishop Whipple, and four or five groups of parish records. The society has continued the use of the Leica camera for copying records that would not otherwise be available to users of its resources. Among materials so reproduced during the year are some ten thousand sheets of records of the Oakland Cemetery in St. Paul. These were placed on films and filed with the society by the cemetery association in order to insure the existence and preservation of a duplicate set. The society has continued to receive calendar cards for Minnesota materials in the federal archives and it has also built up its calendar of Minnesota items published in eastern newspapers of the fifties, in some instances copying interesting letters and articles.

The museum these many years has grown until it is sticking out at the elbows. The ever-present problem of space is necessarily taken into careful consideration by the society before it accepts additional museum gifts. Yet in 1935 there were 617 objects added to the historical, archaeological, ethnological, and numismatic collections, and 3,300 pictures were received, bringing the picture collection as a whole to 51,213. The addition of sixty slides increased the

society's slide collection to 1,562, and 317 items were added to the collection of negatives. A noteworthy accession is an exceedingly rare volume containing sixty-four colored lithographs by J. O. Lewis, an artist who attended the Indian treaty negotiations at Prairie du Chien in 1825 and at Fond du Lac in 1826.

Even in normal times, the society's building is a very busy place, but in the past year alphabetical projects, reflecting society co-operation with the Federal Emergency Relief and Works Progress administrations, have accounted for an extraordinary stir and bustle. What has been accomplished? The archival survey was pushed ahead vigorously in the winter and spring of 1935 with some thirty FERA field workers and a special supervisor. The fruits of their efforts were the completion of the survey of the state archives and of archival inventories in forty-five counties. Since inventories of the records of fifteen county courthouses had been made by the society in 1917 and three more were completed under a recent CWA project, this meant that the job was done for sixty-three of our eighty-seven counties. Twenty-four counties remained, and in nineteen of these work was in progress when the FERA project ended. Sample inventories were also made of municipal archives, including those of Minneapolis and St. Paul, and of village and township records; and in one county a report was prepared on the records of churches, lodges, and various business or social organizations.

All this work resulted in the building up of a central card inventory of immense value, but it was not complete. In December, 1935, therefore, a new project under WPA was set up with the purpose of completing the county inventories for the entire state and also of surveying historic sites, markers, monuments, buildings, trails, and cemeteries. This enterprise, with a staff of some thirty persons, is now in full swing under the competent supervision of Mr. Jacob Hodnefeld, assisted by Miss Elizabeth Shippee and Mr.

Ralph D. Brown. A national survey of state and county archives is also in progress and its directors are planning to place additional funds behind the survey for Minnesota as already launched by the society. The superintendent has also been requested by the authorities at Washington to direct a survey of federal archives within the state of Minnesota, and, if his many other alphabetical burdens do not bring on a fatal cardiac attack, he proposes to accept this new responsibility. Meanwhile, a general state historical project, started in 1934 under FERA auspices, was carried on until the summer of 1935, with an authorized personnel of thirty; in November, under WPA, the work was resumed; and it now has some thirty-six persons assigned to it.

A detailed description of the results achieved through all this emergency work would transcend the limits of this report. The projects have involved many problems of personnel and administration; and the quality of the work done has been marked by some unevenness. It is clear, however, that FERA and WPA have made possible the forwarding of many special projects which the members of the regular staff, carrying heavy routine duties, could not have accomplished for many years, though they have dreamed of such projects, planned them, and in most instances given them the impetus of sustained work and energy. Among the more significant achievements must be mentioned the newspaper bibliography and inventory of files, a gigantic task that begins to approach completion under the leadership of the newspaper librarian, Mr. Arthur J. Larsen, with considerable assistance from other members of the staff; the Minnesota section for the national union list of newspapers, which was recently finished and sent off to Washington; the state and local archival inventory, once little more than a dream, now steadily nearing realization; the analytical picture index, with ten thousand cards already made out, a bit of pioneering in a new field of historical service; the fashioning of miniature models of fur-trading posts, Fort Snelling

as it was in 1850, and other pioneer scenes, which will prove significant additions to the society's educational exhibits; the indexing of the information packed into the early years of the *Minnesota Pioneer*, the first newspaper of frontier St. Paul; the transcribing of vast amounts of selected manuscript and newspaper materials of special historical significance and the translating of certain early German documents of importance; the detailed mapping, on a large scale, of the historic Red River trails; the indexing of the census of 1860; the indexing of Minnesota's Civil War service records; the expanding of the society's general Minnesota biographical index; and the sorting and filing of sundry library collections of documents, including pamphlets and duplicate items.

The society has also co-operated in forwarding various projects that are not under its own direction, including one for writers who, under the direction of Dr. Mabel Ulrich, are preparing a Minnesota state guide; and a number of library projects, especially one involving the compilation of a union list of magazines and periodicals in Twin City libraries.

Even all this does not conclude the story of what FERA and WPA have meant to the society's progress, for many important building improvements have been made or are now being made, with the generous co-operation of the custodian's office. The skylights are being repaired; the window casements are being weather-stripped; the building has been scrubbed, painted, replastered, polished, and renovated until it glistens like the "shining morning face" of Shakespeare's schoolboy. A door has been cut from the auditorium into the side corridor to facilitate ventilation and exit. Perhaps the largest enterprise of all, however, is a vast newspaper and archives filing hall that is being built along the south terrace. This will add to the society's resources a room approximately 73 feet long, 22 feet wide, and deep enough for three stack floors. The project was started under FERA and continued under WPA, with a

grant from the state executive council for materials. It meets one of the grave problems facing the society, that of finding space in which to accommodate the expanding newspaper and archives collections. When stacks and shelves have been installed—and a special appropriation from the legislature must be obtained for this purpose—the rapidly growing collection of bound newspapers, one of the most precious of all our treasures, will have an adequate filing hall for the next fifteen or twenty years, and we shall also be equipped to deal with the problem of archival filing.

Special projects unquestionably have their value, but the undramatic routine work of the staff in administering the society's collections, handling incoming materials, and serving the public is fundamental. In the library 2,455 items were catalogued during the year and 15,200 cards were added to the various card index files, yet despite valiant staff efforts cataloguing and recataloguing lagged behind the volume of accessions. The general Minnesota biographical index gained 1,699 cards through routine staff work and an additional 650 through WPA effort, a total in excess of 2,300. Thirty-four special exhibits have been arranged by the museum; it is now installing the first of a number of miniature groups; problems of exhibit and storage space have become serious as a result of continued expansion; the arranging and cataloguing of new materials have been accomplished in the routine course of things; some additional equipment has been secured, such as a cabinet for lantern slides; and several special tasks have been undertaken, such as the mounting of some seven hundred pictures on cloth. In the manuscript division a filing cabinet has been devised for film storage; adequate equipment has been secured for manuscript map filing; experimentation with Leica photography has continued and not a little new equipment has been added; the arrangement of special collections, such as the Firkins, Wheelock, and Owre papers, has been tackled promptly; the inventory of the society's papers of institu-

tions and organizations has been completed; the working rules for preparing, arranging, and cataloguing manuscripts have been put down in black and white and prepared for publication; WPA assistance has made possible some special work in the society's collection of state archives, but owing to lack of sufficient funds the plan of establishing a new archives position on the staff has not materialized; a questionnaire has been sent out to Congregational pastors in an effort to advance the collection and care of church records; and a manuscript committee, headed by Mr. Ira C. Oehler of St. Paul, has been formed to supplement and extend the society's routine efforts to secure gifts of manuscripts.

The measuring of the use made of the society's collections is always a baffling problem, for there seems to be no qualitative measuring stick that can be applied to it. Numbers are not without interest, however, and it may be noted that during 1935 the society received about 36,000 visitors in its museum, including more than 300 school classes, and served 4,166 patrons of its general library, 2,281 readers of its newspapers, and 486 users of its manuscripts. Perhaps it is more to the point to note that patrons of the several departments included many state legislators and officials, writers from several foreign countries, scholars, novelists, and other special investigators from fifteen or twenty states of the Union, and Minnesotans representing many professions and interests. What better justification can be found of the wisdom of Ramsey, Sibley, and other founders of this repository of historical materials than a wide use, which transmutes the collected treasures of records into articles and books and addresses and discussion? Not infrequently visitors of great distinction have explored the exhibits, manuscripts, and accommodations of the society; and among such visitors none have evinced a keener and livelier interest and appreciation than Colonel and Mrs. Charles A. Lindbergh and Mrs. George Christie, the colonel's half-sister.

Many of the society's activities impinge upon the sphere

of public education; not a few are directly within that sphere. For example, staff members have responded during the year to some seventy-five requests for talks and papers, including radio broadcasts. Many of these addresses have been given before clubs and other organizations in the Twin Cities, but some have been presented at meetings of regional or national associations. Thus the superintendent spoke on "Problems of American Archives" at a national conference of archivists held in Chattanooga late in December and there proposed the creation of an Institute of American Archivists. Several members of the staff have addressed unseen audiences of radio listeners, and Dr. Nute recently was interviewed about manuscript techniques in a special broadcast. The highway marking project has made comparatively little progress during the year, but six additional inscriptions were supplied to the highway department, and the total number of roadside markers was advanced to 103. The reference librarian, conducting the "Information Bureau," has sent out 332 reports, and the general file of special historical reports now numbers more than 1,200. The society continues its interest in the correlation of Minnesota history with national history in the curricula of the schools, and during the year the superintendent, with the assistance of Mr. Lewis Beeson, issued a syllabus entitled the *Modern Commonwealth of Minnesota*, covering state history from 1865 to 1935.

The vitality and momentum of the local history movement in Minnesota are evident in the fact that twelve local historical societies have been organized in the state in the past two years, five of them in 1935. Since this fruitful movement was launched by the Minnesota Historical Society about a decade and a half ago, a half hundred local organizations have been started, and of these probably forty-five are active today. They have good leadership and are making themselves genuinely influential in their communities. Some of their summer meetings attract thousands of

people; notable local museums are being built up, local records are being garnered, and so many other interesting local historical developments are taking place that the state society has to run a special section in its quarterly magazine to keep up with them. The state society last summer promoted the setting up of county WPA historical projects throughout the state, and in many communities such projects are now functioning. The Catholic Historical Society of St. Paul continues to thrive and has recently issued another volume in its valuable yearbook series, *Acta et Dicta*.

As usual, staff members have carried on many special activities, reflecting their professional interests, which can only be alluded to in this report. Dr. Nute is pushing forward the writing of her joint biography of Radisson and Groseilliers; she is editing an English travel diary of western American interest; and the three-volume calendar of American Fur Company papers, compiled under her direction some years ago, is soon to be published by the Alvord Memorial Commission. Mr. Babcock, in addition to carrying an unusual amount of supervisory work and making many field trips and addresses, has found time to write a paper on the pioneer fur-trader, Louis Provençalle; Mr. Larsen is writing a history of Minnesota roads and highways; Miss Krausnick attended the international congress of librarians in Spain last spring; Miss Heilbron has edited the Henry Lewis diary; Miss Jerabek has brought out in six newspaper installments her essay on "A Little Bohemia in the Western World" and has completed a bibliography of the writings of Warren Upham; Dr. Gates, before his departure from the society, wrote some memorable historical essays, including one on the old Lac qui Parle Indian mission; Miss Ingram is making progress on her bibliography of Minnesota fiction; Mrs. Berthel—who is none other than the former Miss Mary E. Wheelhouse—wrote an article on hunting in the seventies; Miss Fawcett prepared for the state library association her annual survey of Min-

nesota publications; and the superintendent has edited a book entitled the *Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg*.

If the achievements of the society during this busiest year in its entire history are noteworthy, the credit goes to a staff that has cheerfully assumed the unusual burdens of supervision occasioned by FERA and WPA projects and at the same time has carried on routine work with devotion, energy, and a fine co-operative spirit. The society regretfully accepted the resignation on July 1 of Dr. Charles M. Gates, who had proved himself competent and resourceful as acting curator of manuscripts and who left to take a position in the National Park Service. In the interval between his resignation and the return of Dr. Nute from her year abroad as a fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Miss Ackermann served as acting curator, aided by the temporary services of Miss Katherine Putnam and Miss Elizabeth Shippee. Mrs. Helen Richter resigned as stenographer in mid-July and Miss Gladys Heimes was appointed to her place. Dr. Nute took up her duties again on August 15, after a fruitful year of research in England and France. The executive council suffered serious losses during the year through the deaths of Mrs. Charles E. Furness, Mrs. James T. Morris, and Mr. Thomas Hughes. Mrs. Furness, the daughter of Governor Ramsey, represented the finest traditions of Minnesota and her gracious and generous spirit will be sorely missed; Mrs. Morris, through her many national and international contacts and interests, played a unique role as a society adviser; and Mr. Hughes, historian of the Minnesota Valley, was a firm link between state and local historical enterprise. As the triennium comes to an end, I desire also to pay tribute to the wise counsel, unflagging interest, and devotion to the welfare of the society that have marked the administration of the outgoing president, Mr. William W. Cutler.

The budget as adopted by the legislature in the spring of 1934 allowed the society for salaries and wages \$29,000.00 for each year of the biennium, as compared with \$26,500.00 two years ago. For supplies and expenses the amount appropriated was the same as that for the preceding biennium, \$15,000.00 for each year. The requested special appropriation for the building of a tier of bookstacks on floor B in the main library was allowed, though the amount was reduced from \$8,500.00 to \$8,000.00. This amount, however, plus a small balance unexpended when floor C was constructed, will enable the society to make the needed installation in 1936. The increase in the appropriation for salaries and wages made it possible to restore at the beginning of the present fiscal year five per cent of the fifteen per cent reduction in salaries that had been made at the start of the preceding biennium. This restoration, though modest, was a welcome relief to the staff in view of the rising scale of living costs.

If sometimes during the year the horizon has seemed to be obscured, it will be recalled that the air has been filled with alphabetical projects, that our personnel has been augmented by considerable groups of FERA and WPA workers, that our activities have indeed been numerous and varied, and that there have been heavy clouds of routine detail. Yet this survey proves unmistakably that the society has advanced steadily and firmly along the three-lane road of collecting and preserving the historical records of Minnesota, of administering its collections efficiently and serving the public effectively, and of carrying the history of the state to the people of the state in a democratic program of education. It also shows that the society, in making its advance, has emphasized co-operation, organization, and planning, which are marks of a Minnesota emerged from pioneer youth into an age of maturity.

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