

THE 1938 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FROM MORE THAN a dozen Minnesota counties, including Clay and Wilkin to the extreme west, Morrison and Cass to the north, St. Louis to the northeast, and Olmsted, Martin, and Wabasha to the south, representatives of local historical societies traveled to St. Paul on January 10 to attend the eighteenth annual conference on local history work in Minnesota — the opening session of the eighty-ninth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society. They assembled in the auditorium of the Historical Building at 10:00 A. M., with Judge Julius E. Haycraft of Fairmont, president of the Martin County Historical Society, presiding.

Judge Haycraft recalled that eight years ago, when he presided at the tenth conference, only sixteen local historical societies had been organized in Minnesota, and he rejoiced that the number has now increased to fifty. Of these only one, that in Yellow Medicine County, was organized in 1937. This "is perhaps an indication that the local history movement is progressing toward maturity," according to the first speaker, Mrs. Russell M. Berthel, editorial assistant on the staff of the Minnesota Historical Society, who opened the conference with a review of "Local Historical Activity in Minnesota in 1937." She suggested "that the initial and contagious enthusiasm of organization has been transferred to the development of the existing societies," which are busy "establishing and developing museums, marking historic sites, holding meetings, conducting membership campaigns, co-operating with each other and with the state society, cataloguing and indexing their collections, indexing newspapers, sponsoring essay contests, and striving in other ways to create a picture of community development and place it before the people." Mrs. Berthel described

the more spectacular activities of the individual societies, noting that the meetings and programs arranged by some attract several thousand people. In closing she paid tribute to two of the leaders of the local history movement in Minnesota — Mr. William E. Culkan of St. Louis County and Professor C. A. Duniway of Rice County, both of whom resigned the presidencies of their societies in the past year.

Judge Haycraft expressed his satisfaction that Mrs. Berthel had mentioned the successful summer meeting of the Martin County Historical Society and noted that plans for the 1938 meeting had already been made. He next called upon Mr. Charles Holmgren of Breckenridge for a report on "Local History Work in Wilkin County." Although the Wilkin County Historical Society, of which he is secretary, has been organized only since May, 1935, it has assembled and placed on display some six hundred museum objects, obtained biographical sketches of about four hundred pioneers, and gathered and arranged clippings of more than twelve hundred newspaper articles of local historical interest. In addition it is co-operating with authorities in Richland County, North Dakota, in planning the restoration of old Fort Abercrombie. In order to enlist the interest of younger members of the community in historical work, a junior group has been organized in the Breckenridge high school, and members often volunteer their services to the officers of the society. The speaker pictured an active and enthusiastic membership that is putting into effect a definite plan of work on the western border of the state.

The next speaker, Mrs. B. T. Willson of Rochester, shifted the scene to southern Minnesota and told of the co-operation of the Rochester Business and Professional Women's Club and the Olmsted County Historical Society in establishing a local historical museum. At a dinner in honor of Mr. Burt W. Eaton, long the president of the society, more than six hundred objects assembled by the club were presented to the society, and Mrs. Willson announced

that they will be displayed in a museum in the new public library building in Rochester. Varied are the items located and obtained by the club members, for, said Mrs. Willson, they include plat books, election returns, hotel registers, diaries, letters, newspaper files, costumes, agricultural implements, and the like. The local museum, she pointed out, offers a "safe place for housing valuable keepsakes" and preserves for "future generations visual knowledge of our local and state history."

Mrs. George A. Pond of St. Paul then told of her experiences in "Hunting Family Records" of her husband's family, which is composed of the descendants of the missionaries to the Minnesota Sioux, Samuel and Gideon Pond. She found that her hunt called for prompt action, "since the old records are being sacrificed to the nomadic habits and restricted housing facilities of the modern family." She told of locating diaries, letters, account books, wedding invitations, confirmation certificates, clippings, and numerous other kinds of records, and in many cases obtaining their transfer to the Minnesota Historical Society. It is only the finding and preservation of records, Mrs. Pond said, that "makes possible and insures their accessibility." Those who fail to preserve their family records, she asserted, "are robbing themselves and their posterity of an invaluable cultural heritage that they can ill afford to lose." Following this paper, Judge Haycraft noted that in the audience of some fifty people was one of the twelve Minnesota "Apostles" honored by Dr. Folwell in the fourth volume of his *History of Minnesota*, Professor T. L. Haecker, "Apostle of Agricultural Coöperation," who was asked to rise and acknowledge the applause of the audience.

A report on "Recent Progress of the Historical Records Survey" by Mr. Jacob Hodnefield of St. Paul, state director of the survey, was the final paper on the conference program. Mr. Hodnefield reviewed the history of the survey, which under the joint auspices of the WPA and the Minne-

sota Historical Society "had expanded from a survey of county archives to a survey of all kinds of historical records." He presented impressive figures to show the extent of the work accomplished by those engaged in the project. They have listed the records of 1,066 townships, 510 municipalities, and 2,787 school districts; and have gathered information about hundreds of churches, cemeteries, monuments and markers, historic buildings and trails, abandoned villages, historic sites, and organizations of many kinds, made inventories of existing state and county archives in Minnesota, and begun the publication of the latter. Mr. Hodnefield reported that a survey of *General Legislation concerning Counties in Minnesota* and inventories of the archives of Freeborn and Blue Earth counties have been issued in mimeographed form by the Historical Records Survey. Brief remarks by two members of the audience brought the morning session to a close. Mr. Eaton told of his association in a Rochester law firm with the late Frank B. Kellogg and paid high tribute to his character and services; and the Honorable Julius A. Schmahl of St. Paul presented personal recollections of many of the Minnesota governors whose portraits hang in the auditorium of the Historical Building.

At 12:15 P. M. about a hundred and fifteen members and friends of the society assembled at the St. Paul Athletic Club for the annual luncheon. For the program of talks that followed, Miss Gratia A. Countryman, librarian emeritus of the Minneapolis Public Library, presided. She opened by calling attention to a recent publication of the University of Minnesota Press—Netta W. Wilson's biography of Dr. Alfred Owre—which was issued as a memorial to the former dean of the dental college. Its author presented the first talk on the program, taking as her subject "Owre's Place in Medical History." Mrs. Wilson said that Dr. Owre "was qualified to practice medicine and surgery as well as dentistry," and he insisted that "dentistry

should be treated as a branch of medical science." Twenty-two years as dean at Minnesota had earned for him a reputation as the "foremost dental educator of his time," when, in 1927, he was called to take over the leadership of the dental school of Columbia University. There he began to put into operation a "plan to provide adequate medical service at reasonable cost to all the people." The dental clinic established at Columbia in harmony with this plan drew the opposition of New York dentists, who in 1933 forced him to resign, and, "two years later he died, a defeated man." But it now seems likely, according to Mrs. Wilson, "that the means he advocated as well as the ends he sought are more or less in line with the trend of history," for group practice, health insurance, group hospitalization, clinics, and medical centers have been generally accepted. Dr. Owre may thus be looked upon as a "pioneer in the fight to improve the health of the people," a man who suffered because his ideas were in advance of his time.

At the conclusion of this talk, Miss Countryman asked Mr. Edward C. Gale, president of the society, to read a letter received from Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh in response to the executive council's invitation to attend the society's annual meeting. "My wife and I both wish that we could be in St. Paul on that date [*January 10*]," he wrote. "We would be greatly interested in seeing the papers, manuscripts and other materials relating to my father's life, which you have assembled. Unfortunately, the shortness of time which remains before we must sail for England, makes it impossible for us to go to Minnesota during our present trip. We hope, however, that we may have the opportunity of accepting a similar invitation sometime in the future when we are not so pressed for time."

In introducing her successor at the Minneapolis Public Library, Mr. Carl Vitz, Miss Countryman explained that since 1933 a businessman, a journalist, a doctor, and a novelist have presented their views on history before members of

the society, who would now learn how "A Librarian Looks at History." The librarian's interest in history, said Mr. Vitz, "is a professional one as against the interest of the businessman or judge who approaches history with an amateur's zeal and a collector's enthusiasm." The "quantitative aspect" of the subject makes it necessary for the librarian "constantly to survey its wide domain." His problem is one of selection in which he must be guided by certain standards, such as the competence of the writer, the timeliness of the material, and the interests of the community that is being served. He noted, however, that the obligation to collect items relating to local history is "less great upon the Minneapolis Public Library because of the existence of the very excellent and very extensive library of the Minnesota Historical Society."

Mr. Vitz was followed by Sister Eucharista Galvin, president of the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, the final speaker on the luncheon program, who discussed "State History and Education." Evidences of racial and cultural influences that have left their marks on Minnesota history are to be found in place names and in the educational institutions of the state, she said. The New England element is responsible for the public school system and for such colleges as Carleton and Macalester, the German and Irish immigrants founded most of the Catholic schools and colleges, and the Scandinavian Lutheran tradition is reflected at St. Olaf College. Minnesota has reached early maturity and it is important that students in its schools should become familiar with its past, Sister Eucharista asserted. She expressed the belief that "by having a living knowledge of Minnesota's first hundred years, we may be urged to literary and artistic endeavor and we surely will understand ourselves and meet our problems with greater discernment and discrimination." Following this talk, Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock rose to call attention to a special exhibit in the society's museum of rare Americana from the library of Mr.

James Ford Bell of Minneapolis. Most of the books on display were narratives of early French and English explorers, including Cartier, Champlain, Hennepin, Lahontan, Robert Rogers, and Alexander Henry. Those who attended the meeting were invited to view the exhibit upon their return to the Historical Building for the afternoon session, which convened at 3:00 P.M. with Mr. Gale presiding.

About sixty people were present to listen to the annual reports of the society's treasurer, Mr. Everett H. Bailey of St. Paul, and of its superintendent, Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, and to hear two papers of historical interest. The first, presented by Mr. G. Hubert Smith of Minneapolis, was offered by its author as an example of what can be done by the user of the sources available in the library and manuscript division of the Minnesota Historical Society. Its title, "Count Andreani: A Forgotten Traveler," indicates the unfamiliar nature of the subject matter as well as of the sources on which it is based. Since Mr. Smith's paper appears elsewhere in this issue of MINNESOTA HISTORY, it is necessary only to say here that it deals with the visit of a titled Italian traveler in 1791 to the Lake Superior region, where he was "testing the French theory of the earth's true shape in the light of his own observations." The second paper, which also is printed in this magazine, is a valuable contribution to the agricultural history of Minnesota prepared by a well-known authority on the subject, Mr. Everett E. Edwards of the United States department of agriculture, in collaboration with Mr. Horace H. Russell. The patient experiments of a German immigrant, Wendelin Grimm, which enabled him to produce a hardy alfalfa on his Carver County farm, and the steps by which this became a leading forage plant of the Northwest are described by the writers. In their absence, the paper was read by Mr. Rodney C. Loehr, a graduate student and teaching assistant in history in the University of Minnesota.

The evening session, which also was held in the Historical Building, was devoted to the annual address presented by Dr. Edgar B. Wesley, professor of education in the University of Minnesota. It appears as the leading article in the present issue of this magazine. Dr. August C. Krey, professor of history in the university, who introduced Dr. Wesley, admitted that he has only learned after long experience to appreciate the fact that unless one understands the operation of local forces in his own community he cannot really understand national and world history. Minnesotans, he said, have been made more than commonly aware of their backgrounds by a historical society that was founded at an early date and has been administered by efficient officers, and by a corps of teachers who understand the importance of local history. For the latter condition he gave credit largely to the speaker of the evening, under whose guidance students of history and the social sciences are trained as teachers in the University of Minnesota. Those who heard Dr. Wesley's brilliant discussion of "History at Home" were not surprised to learn that teachers from his classes have taken a deep interest in community beginnings and have instilled a similar interest in their pupils throughout the state. That history not only "begins at home," but that "it is written at home, and at home finds its greatest utility" is Dr. Wesley's contention. The representatives of local historical societies who attended the 1938 meeting must have found inspiration for a new year's work in the speaker's assertion that "Local history is the beginning and the end of our historical efforts."

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