

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

HISTORICAL ACTIVITIES IN WAR TIME

At first thought it might seem that students and teachers of history as such would be less affected by the Great War and by the participation of the United States therein than almost any other group of citizens. That thought is based on the conception of the historian as an antiquarian interested only in the remote past and giving no heed to the possible bearing of his material on the life of the present. The modern student of history, however, considers that one of his principal objects in investigating the past is to contribute to an accurate understanding of the present, which is an outgrowth of that past.

Shortly after the adoption by Congress of the resolution declaring the existence of a state of war with Germany, a number of the most eminent historical scholars of the United States met in Washington and organized the National Board for Historical Service. "The main function of the board" is declared to be "to serve the nation, in a time when the national problems of war and of ultimate peace cannot receive their best solution without the light of historical knowledge, by mediating between the possessors of such knowledge on the one hand, and on the other hand the government and the public who need it; in a word, to mobilize the historical forces of the country for all the services to which they can be put."¹ Under the auspices of this board "history men" all over the country have been collecting and disseminating information of an historical character bearing on the problems connected with the war. Some of the results of this work have been or are to be published by the Committee on Public Information of the

¹For fuller information about the purposes and activities of the National Board for Historical Service, see the *American Historical Review*, 21: 831-835, 918 (July, 1917); and the *History Teacher's Magazine*, 8: 199 (June, 1917).

federal government. This coöperation between the board, which is a purely unofficial organization, and the government has been facilitated by the appointment of Dr. Guy Stanton Ford, professor of history in the University of Minnesota and a member of the council of the Minnesota Historical Society, to the position of director of the division of civic and educational coöperation of the Committee on Public Information. Dr. Ford was one of the group of men who were instrumental in organizing the board and he is now serving as one of its members.

One of the devices selected by the board for encouraging the study of the historical background of the war and particularly of American participation therein has been the establishment of a series of contests in the writing of essays by public school teachers on the subject "Why the United States is at War." The generosity of a patriotic citizen of Minnesota, who prefers that his name remain unknown, has made it possible for one of these contests to be conducted in this state, and the superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society has been placed in charge of local arrangements. The prizes offered for the best essay aggregate three hundred dollars and are equally divided into two groups, one for teachers in high schools and one for those in public elementary schools. The contest is being given publicity by the distribution of circulars and through the press, and the prospects are that a large number of teachers will participate. Six prominent citizens of the state are to be chosen to act as judges, three for each class of contestants; and the essays are all to be submitted by January 1.

Another phase of the activity of the national board is the encouragement of the collection and preservation of materials for the history of American participation in the war. A committee has been appointed to prepare a manual on this subject for distribution to libraries, historical societies, and others who may be interested in the work. It is obvious that the best time to gather the materials for history, particularly such as are of a fugitive and ephemeral nature, is when they are

current; but it would never occur to the average individual, unless his attention were specially called to it, that such things might be worth preserving, although he would be quick to recognize the interest and value of similar items of the Revolutionary or Civil War periods. Frequently librarians, and sometimes even those in charge of historical collections, fail to realize that the present will soon be the past and that current material will be the sources of history in the future.

Fortunately there are, here and there, men who recognize the opportunity and are making the most of it. In North Carolina the state council of defense has appointed an historical committee headed by R. D. W. Connor, secretary of the North Carolina Historical Commission, and this committee is circulating a leaflet calling attention to the various classes of material which should be preserved. One of the most promising plans is that developed by the council of defense of Eau Claire County, Wisconsin. Under the leadership of W. W. Bartlett, chairman, the committee has arranged for the compilation of scrapbooks containing clippings from the local papers, programs, handbills, and pictures relating to the country's participation in the war. Correspondence from men in service and reports from local organizations are also to be collected and preserved. All this material, it is expected, will be turned over to the local library.

In Minnesota the historical society has followed the practice for a number of years of collecting a considerable amount of typical ephemera of the present day, and it was easy to include the war material. Interesting examples of the results of this work are the recruiting posters collected from the local offices of the British Recruiting Mission and the Navy League, and from the United States Marine Recruiting Station in St. Paul. Attempts are being made to secure representatives in all parts of the state who will gather war material for the society in their localities, and local libraries are urged to make similar collections. The field agent of the society, Mr. Holbrook, is able to accomplish considerable along these lines in the communi-

ties which he visits. Among the most valuable records are those which accumulate in the hands of the county directors appointed by the Minnesota Public Safety Commission; at the suggestion of the historical society the commission sent a circular letter to each of these men directing them to preserve all records and correspondence, and ultimately to turn them over to the society. For a large part of his material the future historian of the rôle played by the state and its component parts in the war will have to rely upon files of newspapers. The Minnesota Historical Society has for many years been receiving and preserving the current issues of hundreds of newspapers and periodicals published in the state. At the time of the declaration of war the list included over half the entire number with at least one from each county. Many other papers have now been added, including especially those which reflect or mold the opinions of special groups or interests. In addition to the accumulation of this material, members of the staff of the society have been examining the files and making an index of all the valuable material illustrative of Minnesota's participation in the war.

Some of the subjects touched upon in this note will probably be dealt with more fully in future issues of the BULLETIN, particularly the ways and means of collecting and preserving material. Enough has been said, however, to make it clear that the worker in the field of history who desires to do so can find ample opportunity for service in war time along the line of his profession or avocation.

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THE PRESERVATION OF NEWSPAPERS

In popular estimation the newspaper is cheap, yet few things appeal more intimately to humanity. It instructs the inquiring, delights the gossip lover, gauges public sentiment for the politician, vents man's vanity, and punishes the evil-doer. No



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