

## THE STATE HISTORICAL CONVENTION OF 1939

A MEDICAL CENTER of international fame, a rich agricultural area, a scenic wonderland, a city that found its first growth as a river port and developed as a manufacturing center, a summer resort that attracted tourists as long ago as the 1850's—these were the objectives of the seventeenth state historical convention and tour under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society. On Thursday, June 15, in the early afternoon, a chartered bus carrying more than twenty tourists left the Historical Building in St. Paul for Rochester; by the time they reached their destination a half dozen or more private cars had joined the tour. To aid the tourists on their trip southward through the rich farming areas of Dakota, Goodhue, and Olmsted counties, and throughout the later course of the tour, six mimeographed sheets providing "Glimpses of the History of the Route" were furnished by the society, through the tour manager, Dr. Arthur J. Larsen. On the cover page was a useful map of the route to be followed, locating the places at which sessions were to be held and the cities and villages through which the tour would pass. In this guide the tourists learned that at Zumbrota, in the Goodhue County fairgrounds, an old covered bridge that until recently spanned the Zumbro River, is preserved. Those who traveled by bus were fortunate enough to see and examine this quaint structure, which was built in the early 1860's and is said to be the only bridge of its kind still in existence in Minnesota.

The tour reached Rochester about 3:45 P. M., and by 4:00 P. M. forty or fifty people had assembled in the Mayo Clinic for a trip through this world-famous medical institu-

tion. In Plummer Hall, on the fourteenth floor of the clinic's skyscraper home, the tourists were greeted by Mr. Ernest Schlitgus of its business staff, who concisely described the building and its functions. Beginning with the carillon in the tower he told of the features of each floor, before conducting the visitors through the structure. The beautiful library, with every facility for medical research and study; a typical examining floor; the board rooms with the diplomas, robes, and decorations of the Drs. Mayo; the switchboard with its complicated system of lights for the prompt locating of doctors; the enormous rooms in which are filed records of all patients examined and treated—these were among the features of the clinic that were viewed by the visitors, who learned that through its facilities more than three thousand patients a week are examined. From the clinic, the tourists went through a tunnel to the Mayo Foundation Museum of Hygiene and Medicine, to see a display unique in the United States.

Some eighty people attended the dinner in the Pine Room of the Hotel Carlton at 6:30 P.M., an occasion for which Dr. Thomas B. Magath of Rochester, a member of the historical society's executive council, served as toastmaster. He called first upon Mr. Arthur Reiter, president of the Rochester park board, who welcomed the visitors and expressed appreciation of the fact that they had come to help open the new museum of the Olmsted County Historical Society. On behalf of the state society, Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, its superintendent, responded, pointing out that the central purpose of these tours is to encourage people throughout the state to save their historical records and to preserve them in museums like that about to be opened in Rochester. For planning the Olmsted County museum and winning the support of the community, he paid tribute especially to Mr. Burt W. Eaton, a Rochester pioneer of the 1850's, a "living link with our yesterdays" who is president of the county historical society, and to Mrs. Bunn T. Will-

son, whose work and enthusiasm did much to turn Mr. Eaton's dream into a reality.

Following Dr. Blegen's remarks, the meeting adjourned to Plummer Hall, where about a hundred people gathered for the main program of the Rochester session. It was opened by Miss Helen Clapesattle, assistant editor on the staff of the University of Minnesota Press, who in a paper entitled "Health and Medicine in Early Rochester" suggested some of the backgrounds of the institution viewed a few hours earlier and explained why the "nation's largest medical clinic" came into being in a rural section of southern Minnesota. The speaker limited her discussion to the period from 1855 to 1870, years during which "Rochester grew from a stagecoach station . . . into a busy, booming little city of nearly five thousand inhabitants." She pictured this new community of pioneers, who, like others of their kind, "experienced most of the common ills of the flesh." The speaker told how these frontier folk frequently prescribed for themselves, or turned for relief to one of the allopaths, homeopaths, eclectics, hydropathists, and other medical practitioners to be found in such centers as Rochester. In the Rochester infirmary established in 1858, a medical society formed at Rochester in 1868, and other features of life in this pioneer community Miss Clapesattle found evidence that on the Olmsted County frontier existed a "potential medical center." Elsewhere in this magazine, her paper is published in full.

In introducing the next speaker, Mrs. Willson, Dr. Magath gave her credit for establishing the museum of the Olmsted County Historical Society and for doing it without funds. Taking as her subject "Why I Am Interested in Local History," she revealed that she had spent four years working toward the museum then being opened. As a place in which "visible history" could be preserved for posterity and made to commemorate the services of the pioneers, Mrs. Willson said that she looked upon the museum merely as a beginning.

She hopes in time to install many additional exhibits, to make of the manuscript collection a true research tool, and eventually to see this museum housed in a fireproof building of its own. Dr. Magath next called upon Mr. Eaton, who has long planned for the museum and who has actually lived the history that it preserves. In opening his remarks, Mr. Eaton gave credit to organizations like the Olmsted County Historical Society for bringing local history close to the people and making it live for them. He revealed that for years he has been collecting objects for a historical museum, making of his office a veritable "old curiosity shop," and that hundreds of other items were assembled by the local Women's Business and Professional Club under Mrs. Willson's leadership. It was not until a new library building was erected, however, that space was made available for the society's collections. There, he told the audience, can now be found such precious records of pioneer life as the files of Rochester newspapers, covering the years from 1859 to 1912, accumulated by the late Charles C. Willson. He stressed the fact that the museum was still incomplete, that many cases and exhibits remain to be installed, but he invited members of the audience to go to the Rochester Public Library, where the museum would be open for inspection. There, in a large basement room, the visitors saw a historical display of astonishing variety and interest, a collection that has already taken rank as one of the most important historical museums in the state.

A tour of the city on Friday morning, June 16, was the final feature of the visit to Rochester. In the library of the Rochester High School the tourists viewed a mural executed by artists engaged in a WPA project under the direction of Mr. Clement Haupers. It depicts the old and the new on an early overland trail from Dubuque to Fort Snelling, giving glimpses of Carimona, Chatfield, Rochester, Zumbrota, Cannon Falls, and St. Paul. After leaving the high school, the route led to such places of interest as the

old Olmsted County Courthouse, the Mayo Foundation Home, St. Mary's Park, and Mayowood, the beautiful estate of the late Dr. Charles H. Mayo, with its artificial lake and wooded hills. Past the estate of the late Dr. H. S. Plummer and through Soldiers' Field, a municipal park and recreation center, the trail led back into the heart of the city, ending at the new Mayo Civic Auditorium, a gift to the city by the Mayo Properties Association and the late Dr. C. H. Mayo as a memorial to his son Joseph. The tourists saw the large arena, the smaller theater, and an attractive exhibit hall in this beautifully arranged auditorium.

Southward from Rochester the motor caravan turned its course, traveling by way of Chatfield and Preston to Harmony, only a few miles from the Iowa border. There a luncheon in the local Lutheran church was followed by a joint session with the Fillmore County Historical Society in the high school auditorium, with about a hundred and thirty people in attendance. While they were still at the luncheon table, Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the state historical society's museum, who presided, called upon the society's president, Mr. Ira C. Oehler of St. Paul, to read a letter addressed to Mr. Eaton on behalf of Dr. William J. Mayo, in which he expressed his interest in the tour. Mr. Babcock then asked the Honorable Victor E. Lawson of Willmar, a member of the state society's executive council who has been attending its tours for years, to say a few words.<sup>1</sup> He remarked upon the importance of the tours in arousing interest in local history throughout the state, and expressed satisfaction at finding an active historical society in Fillmore County. Musical selections by the men's chorus of Harmony and a few words of greeting from Mr. Ben Fedas, the mayor of the village, opened the session in the high school. Mr. John C. Mills, president of the Fillmore

<sup>1</sup>A detailed account of the tour of 1939 by Mr. Lawson appears in four installments in the editorial column of the *Willmar Daily Tribune* from June 19 to 22. Mr. Lawson is publisher of the *Tribune*.

County Historical Society, then welcomed the tourists, stating that his organization found inspiration in this visit of the state society. He gave Mr. Eaton credit for helping to organize the society in 1934 and for his continuing interest in this neighbor organization. The Fillmore County society, said Mr. Mills, had a hundred and thirty-five members shortly after it was organized; its officers are now making efforts to enroll a hundred life members and to obtain quarters for a museum.

Mr. Mills was followed on the program by Mr. Joseph Ball of St. Paul, who took as his subject "John S. Harris, A Pioneer Horticulturist of Southern Minnesota." Mr. Ball is engaged in compiling material for a history of horticulture in Minnesota, and his search for sources led to the discovery of forty-six diaries kept by Harris from 1855 to 1901. Their perusal enabled the speaker to build up a picture of a frontier gardener who experimented with apple culture on his farm at La Crescent, and whose writings on the subject eventually won him a position as horticultural editor of *Farm, Stock and Home*. Like most of the pioneers who tried to raise apples, said Mr. Ball, Harris paid little attention to climate. The speaker has found evidence that experiments with nearly two hundred and fifty varieties of apples and crabs were made in frontier Minnesota, and that of these only "about half a dozen varieties of apples and less than that many crabs" are now raised in the state. By reading extracts from Harris' diaries, especially those of 1856 and 1860, Mr. Ball made his subject live for the audience. In his entry for January 18, 1860, Harris expressed his confidence in the future of frontier Minnesota, which he believed had "all of the elements for a good agricultural district." "By the hand of enterprise and industry," he continues, "this must be the garden of the great Northwest. Then our beautiful valleys will be covered with fields of waving grain and our hills with herds of cattle and sheep and the hum of business, the rattle of machinery and

the whistle of the iron horse will break the stillness that now reigns over us." He thought, however, that "it would be much pleasanter living in this country if we had plenty of fruit," adding confidently, "and I believe it can be raised here." Mr. Ball suggested that diaries as valuable and interesting as that kept by Harris are doubtless to be found in Fillmore County, and he expressed the hope that the local historical society would seek out and preserve such records of the past in its county.

An interlude of music by the local boys' harmonica band preceded the final paper on the program—a discussion of "Business Records and the Historian" by Dr. Rodney C. Loehr of the department of history in the University of Minnesota. He stressed the importance of the preservation of records of business concerns, large and small, not only for the historian, but for the businessman himself and for the general public. He then described some of the items included in the enormous collections of business records assembled at the Baker Library of Harvard University—account books of a general store at Norwich, Connecticut, from 1792 to 1814; a handbill issued by an early telegraph company; the account book of a Yankee peddler of 1849; the business papers of Frederic Tudor, the "ice king of early nineteenth-century America"; the logbook of a clipper ship of the 1860's. Turning to local records, Mr. Loehr gave examples of business papers preserved by the Minnesota Historical Society, such as fur trade records, the hotel register kept at the old Carimona House, and the papers of Jason C. Easton, a pioneer banker of southern Minnesota. He called attention to a business record of a "unique and picturesque kind" in the immediate vicinity of Harmony—a general store established at Forestville about 1852 which was in operation until one day about thirty-six years ago, when its owner, the late Thomas J. Meighen, "walked out, locked the front door, and left for posterity an example of the frontier store." The speaker suggested

that the permanent preservation of this interesting historical record "is well worth the attention of the local historical society." He closed by appealing to all those present who might know of available business records to communicate with their local historical society, the Minnesota Historical Society, or the history department of the University of Minnesota. At the conclusion of this paper, the tourists were invited to visit the private museum of Mrs. S. B. Johnson, which is located in a log cabin in the garden of her home at Harmony. In an arbor near by, the visitors had an opportunity to see a demonstration of the carding and spinning of raw wool by women who have continued in American homes the useful arts learned in the Scandinavian North.

The journey from Harmony to Winona followed a route that for pastoral beauty probably cannot be surpassed in the Northwest. Between Preston and Rushford the blue waters of the Root River were usually in sight, now from a towering hilltop, as at Lanesboro Roadside Park, where the tourists paused to view a sweeping panorama of hills and valleys, again from the deep cool forests that line its banks. Villages nestling in quiet valleys, comfortable farm homes, picturesque red barns, cultivated fields, grazing Holsteins, and forest-clad hills of almost mountainous proportions give to the scenery of this verdant area a variety that is seldom encountered. A plateau region beyond Rushford ends abruptly in the bluffs of the Mississippi above Winona, which was reached at about six in the afternoon.

Three-quarters of an hour later the tourists were assembled once more in the hills, at the picturesquely located Winona Country Club, where the dinner session was held. The president of the state society, Mr. Oehler, a former resident of Winona, presided at this session, which was attended by about seventy-five people—tourists, Winona residents, and members of county historical organizations. Expressions of welcome by three local leaders followed the dinner. Senator M. J. Galvin spoke first, stressing the im-

portance of the impartial approach in history; Mr. Homer Goss, president of the Winona County Historical Society, brought greetings from that organization; and Judge Harry L. Buck represented the Winona County Old Settlers' Association, of which he is president. He reported that this organization has now been active for fifty years, and he recalled many interesting incidents in the history of the city and the county. Mr. Oehler thanked these speakers, and then explained the aims of the Minnesota Historical Society, the state's oldest institution, in preserving records of the past and making them available. As an example of its work he cited the collection of the papers of Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr., that is now being assembled and told of Colonel Lindbergh's personal visit to the society's building.

At the conclusion of his talk, Mr. Oehler asked members of the audience to move to an adjoining room, where they reassembled to hear Dr. William J. Petersen, research associate on the staff of the State Historical Society of Iowa, present an address on "Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi River," and to see more than seventy slides illustrative of this subject. Dr. Petersen is the author of a volume of nearly six hundred pages on *Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi*. While assembling material for this study the author made numerous trips on the upper river, becoming familiarly known among rivermen and others as "Steamboat Bill." By way of introduction, he outlined the story of steamboating above St. Louis, from 1823, when the "Virginia" made the first voyage over the lower and upper rapids and through Lake Pepin to Fort Snelling, to 1927 and the establishment of the Federal Barge Line. He then discussed five periods of steamboat history, which he described as the lead, immigration, and grain periods, the period of decline after the building of railroads, and the era of the barges. In the earliest period, from 1823 to 1848, he said, the boats were an important factor in the development of the lead mines of Iowa and Wisconsin, for they transported

the products of the mines to market. The passenger traffic was dominant, the speaker revealed, in the years from 1848 to 1870, when hordes of settlers from the eastern states and from Europe were finding new homes in the Northwest. He discussed also the Indians, fur traders, explorers, soldiers, travelers, government officials, and others who made their way northward on the decks and in the cabins of upper Mississippi steamboats, enlivening his narrative with many colorful tales of river life. The boats as freight carriers for wheat and other products of the Northwest that were shipped to eastern and southern markets also received attention. The entire discussion was richly illustrated with lantern slides—pictures of steamboats, portraits of their captains, photographs or paintings of scenes on the river and of towns along its banks, maps, early bills of lading, advertisements of steamboats, and the like, all collected by the speaker in the course of his study of steamboating.

Before leaving Winona on the morning of June 17, the visitors enjoyed a trip in private cars furnished by the local chamber of commerce to Garvin Heights State Park. There, from the crest of one of the hills that overlook the city from the west, they had a sweeping view of the great valley of the Mississippi, with Mount Trempealeau to the south, Wabasha Prairie of old—now the site of a prosperous city—below, and the winding course of the Father of Waters making its way between frowning bluffs to the north. It was this course to the north that the tour followed on its way to Frontenac, pausing only at Lake City, where members of the Lake Pepin Valley Historical Society joined the caravan, and again a few miles beyond for a view of the famous Maiden Rock on the Wisconsin shore of Lake Pepin. A short distance farther on, the tour left the main highway to follow a gravel road that passes the Villa Maria, a Catholic school for girls; Pointe au Sable and the site of Fort Beauharnois, a French post established in 1727; and a number of the picturesque summer homes erected by mem-

bers of the Garrard family and others at old Frontenac. On a map of the locality, included in the mimeographed guide prepared by the historical society, the tourists found located and identified these interesting buildings and sites. The road that they were following ended at Frontenac Inn, built shortly after the Civil War on the banks of Lake Pepin, where the final session was held.

About a hundred people, many of whom came from the Twin Cities for the occasion, attended the luncheon and the program that followed in this nineteenth-century summer hotel. Brief remarks by Mr. B. J. Loss, who represented the Lake Pepin Valley Historical Society and who made a plea for the setting aside of Pointe au Sable as a state park, by Mr. C. A. Rasmussen of Red Wing, president of the Goodhue County Historical Society, and by Mr. Oehler preceded the program proper, which was presented in the inn's old-fashioned pavilion. Mr. James Gray, the well-known author and literary critic of St. Paul, presided. He opened by calling attention to the fact that in a state as new as Minnesota, "history is very close to us," so close that especially in places so little changed by recent progress as old Frontenac "we can reach out and touch it." In doing this, however, said Mr. Gray, we need guidance, and one of the functions of the Minnesota Historical Society is to give that guidance. As a scholar who has done much to guide Minnesotans along historical paths he introduced the first speaker, Dr. Grace Lee Nute, curator of manuscripts on the society's staff.

Dr. Nute took as her subject "The Lure of Old Frontenac," explaining that the "spot has exercised a siren influence on practically every generation" since the French built Fort Beauharnois more than two centuries ago. "Explorer, trapper, hunter, artist, tourist, ornithologist — these are some that have heard the siren's song," she said. She recalled the circumstances under which the French post was built in 1727 "to keep the Sioux from molesting French

traders and explorers along the more northern route to the West." She then told of the American trader, James Wells, who established himself on Lake Pepin in 1831 in "two unfinished stone buildings surrounded by the skin lodges of his half-breed wife's relatives and friends." It was in the early 1850's said the speaker, that some hunters from Cincinnati stopped at the site of Frontenac and were so taken by its charm that they bought land there and soon were erecting pretentious homes. These were the brothers, Louis and Israel Garrard. The latter named his house St. Hubert's Lodge in honor of the patron saint of huntsmen. Dr. Nute told of the building of Frontenac Inn, originally known as the Lakeside Hotel, in a period when the resort became known as the "Newport of the Northwest." These were the days when "palatial river steamers stopped at the landing near the inn" to let off travelers from the South and East. The arrivals both of boats and of guests, she revealed, are recorded in registers of the inn going back to 1871, some of which are now preserved by the Minnesota Historical Society. She called attention also to the recent recognition of Frontenac as a "paradise for bird lovers and ornithologists."

The enchantment of old Frontenac, said Dr. Nute, is well expressed by Augustus O. Moore, an artist from Cincinnati who like throngs of others in his day went to Minnesota in search of health. She read in full a letter that Moore wrote to his wife from St. Paul on September 25, 1862, just after a visit to Frontenac. He urged her to join him there with their children, for while there he "felt bewitched," he writes. "I thought I had better get away from the enchanted spot & then after looking about a little more make a decision," he continues, "but I think you should begin to pack up for if you come I want you here during the beautiful autumn weather. This *Siberia* has lost all its terrors to me now." He writes that "I have by no means got rid of the enchantment by going away from the place. I find

my mind continually planning to live there & no other place seems to be *the* place." With Mrs. Moore when she joined her husband at Frontenac was their little daughter Nina, now Mrs. Francis Tiffany of St. Paul. Dr. Nute announced that Mrs. Tiffany was in the audience and called upon this pioneer visitor to the Minnesota resort to give a "first-hand account of the lure of old Frontenac, as she knew it seventy-seven years ago." With great charm, Mrs. Tiffany told of the trip up the Mississippi with her mother, sister, and baby brother, of landing one dark evening on a bare sand bank, and of meeting her father, who came with an ox-drawn wagon to take his family and their luggage to the house on the hill that he had rented for the winter. She recalled the adventures of the months that followed—how her father had to provide meat for his little family by hunting, how the passenger pigeons passed in seemingly endless flight in the spring. As the presiding spirit of the little community she described Mrs. Sarah Belle McLean, the mother of the Garrard brothers and the widow of Judge John McLean of the United States Supreme Court.

For the final paper of the Frontenac session, Mr. Gray called upon Dr. Blegen, who described for the audience "The 'Fashionable Tour' on the Upper Mississippi." This tour by steamboat from St. Louis or Galena to the Falls of St. Anthony is closely identified with the beginnings of the Minnesota tourist trade, now one of the state's major industries, according to Dr. Blegen. He gave to George Catlin, the well-known artist of American Indian life, credit for "calling attention to the vacation possibilities" of this trip on the upper river, after a visit to Fort Snelling in 1835. The speaker drew upon records left by Fredrika Bremer, the Swedish author; Ida Pfeiffer, an Austrian lady of wealth; Anthony Trollope, the British novelist; and many others who made the "Fashionable Tour." Dr. Blegen's paper will be published in full in a future issue of this magazine.

With the conclusion of this paper, the formal session came to a close. It was followed, however, by a brief tour of old Frontenac, which gave some of the tourists, guided by Mr. Rasmussen, the opportunity to visit the cemetery in which General Garrard and many of the other early residents of the village are buried, and others a chance to see the interior of one of the community's old mansions. This was the home of Mrs. McLean, now owned by Mr. Edward S. Hall of Red Wing. On the tour of this house, with its high ceilings, stately rooms, and beautiful staircase, Miss Frances Densmore of Red Wing acted as guide. From Frontenac, with its atmosphere of a day long past, the tourists turned homeward, feeling that they had caught intimate glimpses of the lives of the frontier doctors, farmers, rivermen, health-seekers, and travelers who once lived, worked, and played in the region they had traversed.

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