

The Minnesota Historical Society in 1941

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TWENTY-FOUR YEARS have passed since the Minnesota Historical Society moved into its present home. In 1918, as in the present, we were engaged in a bitter war, fighting for historic ideals, for the preservation of the democracy upon which this nation is founded — the democracy which, in the final analysis, is personified in institutions like the Minnesota Historical Society. Within the quarter century that has elapsed since those earlier war days, the society has experienced a rebirth. In that period it has developed into one of the great historical agencies of America.

The society's position for meeting the challenge of a wartime world is not unfavorable. The membership lists indicate that it is in a healthy condition, although it is not growing as rapidly as we think it should. During the year a total of 102 new members were enrolled and one member was reinstated. Forty-six members were lost by death, however, and 56 were dropped for nonpayment of dues. At the close of the year, the society had a grand total of 1,609 members of all kinds, a net gain of one over the figure for last year. It is an active and interested membership, and it has demonstrated its friendly appreciation of the society in numerous and unexpected ways.

During the triennium just past, there were several changes in the personnel of the society's executive council. Three valued members of the council elected in 1939 were lost through death — Mrs. E. B. Young of St. Paul, Mr. Nathaniel P. Langford of St. Paul, and the beloved pioneer of Olmsted County, Mr. Burt W. Eaton of Rochester. In their places, Miss Laura Furness of St. Paul, Mr. L. A. Rossman of Grand Rapids, and the secretary-superintendent were elected.

A number of well-attended meetings were held during the year. The annual meeting, on January 20, commemorated the centennial

of the founding of the chapel from which St. Paul took its name. The luncheon session, which was attended by more than four hundred persons, featured addresses by Archbishop John Gregory Murray and Mrs. Grace Flandrau, who described various aspects of the development of the capital city. A morning session was devoted to local history problems, and in the afternoon informal groups continued the discussion. At the evening meeting a brilliant account of the musical Hutchinson family in Minnesota was presented by Professor Philip D. Jordan of Miami University at Oxford, Ohio. It was excellently illustrated by typical songs of the mid-nineteenth century, performed by students from Hamline University. The Minnesota Historical Society joined with the Hennepin County Historical Society in April to present Dean Theodore C. Blegen in an illustrated lecture on the upper Mississippi. The meeting, held in the auditorium of the Historical Building, was attended by more than two hundred people. In July the society made its usual annual summer tour, which, after a morning session in the Nerstrand Woods in Rice County, culminated in the observance, in conjunction with the Nicollet County Historical Society, of the ninetieth anniversary of the signing of the treaty of Traverse des Sioux. Luncheon and dinner meetings were held at St. Peter, and in midafternoon Governor Harold E. Stassen addressed an audience of more than five hundred persons on the treaty grounds at Traverse des Sioux State Park. About a hundred people made the entire trip. The final meeting of the year was held in the Historical Building on October 13, in connection with the fall meeting of the executive council. Before an audience of about two hundred, Mr. Dewey Albinson of Minneapolis spoke on "Indian Life and Customs at Grand Portage," and motion pictures of the Grand Portage country, filmed by Mr. Elmer Albinson, were shown.

The principal contact that the society has with the people of the state is through its publications. The year was conspicuous for the success with which the challenge of the reading public was met. The twenty-second volume of the society's quarterly magazine, *Minnesota History*, a book of 448 pages, exclusive of the index, was published during the year. The volume contains fifteen major articles

or documents, thirty reviews of books of interest to Minnesotans, and 137 pages of notes about items of historical interest. Forty authors contributed to make this a highly successful volume. One reader comments on the "high quality of professional historical work" and the "sense of friendly and local humane interests" which he finds in the magazine; and the editor of a national historical periodical compliments the society in these words: "I feel that you are setting a very high standard in state historical magazines, and there are some who feel there is no superior. The articles are well written and edited and the local news carry considerable sparkle."

In June, as the result of the friendly interest of a member of the society, the scholarly yet popular *Voyageur's Highway*, of which Dr. Grace Lee Nute is the author, was published. The book was priced to meet a popular demand, it was attractively printed and bound, and abundantly illustrated. Its success was immediate, and the first printing of four thousand copies was exhausted within sixty days of its publication. More than half of a second printing of three thousand copies also has been sold. A reviewer described the book as "an example of what can be done when an able professional historian turns her hand to popularization."

For years the society has felt the need for a fund devoted to the publication of special studies on Minnesota history. With the appearance of the *Voyageur's Highway*, the special publications fund of the Minnesota Historical Society was inaugurated. The fund is small, but it is a nucleus upon which to build. Gifts or bequests, large or small, will be welcomed as an aid to augmenting the publication fund.

The society now has in press a volume of documents relating to the history of early missionary activities in the Northwest, for which Dr. Nute has prepared an introduction and annotations. This is the first volume in a series dedicated to the memory of Clarence W. Alvord, who is often regarded as the outstanding American historian of the first quarter of this century. Professor Alvord had many Minnesota connections. He served for a time as a member of the history faculty of the University of Minnesota, and he was an active member of the executive council of this society. Upon his death the

Mississippi Valley Historical Association created the Alvord Memorial Commission to raise funds for the publication of volumes of documentary materials relating to the history of the Mississippi Valley and adjoining areas. Representatives of the Minnesota Historical Society have been associated with this commission from the beginning, with Dr. Solon J. Buck, Dr. Lester B. Shippee, and, more recently, Dr. Nute serving as chairman of the body. When the commission decided to inaugurate its publication program by issuing the missionary documents, the society was asked to prepare the volume for publication, arrange for printing, and see it through the press, and the Alvord Memorial Commission agreed to pay all printing costs. In return for its services, the society will be able to grant its members a substantial discount on the book. The manuscript for this volume is now in the hands of the printer, and publication has been promised for early spring. The book is a fitting tribute to a distinguished American historian, and the society is proud to have a part in initiating this series.

Throughout the year, the society has continued to supply the newspapers of the state with news stories of Minnesota historical interest. Twelve issues of the monthly *Minnesota Historical News* were distributed to over six hundred newspapers. A publication that the society formerly issued periodically, the quarterly *Checklist of Minnesota Public Documents*, has been discontinued. Since most of the information contained therein is included in other lists, it seemed wise to conserve the slender resources of the society for more urgent needs. Accordingly, the last issue, which carried the listing through 1940, was published in March.

For a generation before Minnesota Territory was organized, Fort Snelling stood guard over a frontier subject to threat of attack by enemies, red and white. In the shelter of its gray walls the Minnesota of today was cradled. It is but fitting that the society should recognize the significance of this pioneer military establishment in the development of the Northwest. When, in 1939, a movement was begun for the preservation of the old Round Tower as a historical museum, the Minnesota Historical Society heartily endorsed the project. The work was completed in 1941, and the museum was

opened in the spring. Under the terms of an agreement between the commanding officer at the fort and the society, the Minnesota Historical Society has accepted ownership of the furniture and equipment and responsibility for the exhibits. The Round Tower has become a second museum for the society and a historical shrine for the people of the state.

Attendance figures for the society itself reveal a growing appreciation of its resources, for their use by the public during 1941 reached proportions never before equalled. More than 40,000 visitors to the museum were recorded. In recent years, the figures of museum attendance have been characterized by steadily increasing numbers of school classes and groups. In 1941 a total of 508 such school groups with a membership of 15,034 teachers and children visited the museum—almost 3,000 more than in any previous year. It is evident that the society is being used as an educational aid for thousands of school children who are enabled to visualize Minnesota life and customs of the past in terms of the actual objects that Minnesotans used in their daily lives. In the library 6,307 readers used almost 30,000 books and other printed items. The newspaper department served the needs of 3,393 persons, who used 8,106 bound volumes of newspapers and more than 70,000 current, unbound issues. The figures for these departments are about normal. An unprecedented demand for public service occurred in the manuscript division, as 3,165 persons descended upon it. The figure represents an increase of almost 1,000 over the total recorded in 1940, and it is almost ten times as great as that for 1931. To a large extent, the enormous increase is explained by the need for affidavits and certificates of age, residence, and citizenship for purposes of employment in national defense industries, for draft registration, for old-age assistance, and for general employment and travel demands. In many instances the sole sources of such evidence are the manuscript census schedules, which are in the custody of the society.

Significant work in collecting materials relating to Minnesota history was done in 1941. The manuscript division reports the addition to its holdings of 209 collections of papers, many of which are of great importance. They are divided into two large groups, orig-

inals and filmslides, with the filmslides in general slightly more significant than the additions to original collections. Among the important Minnesota collections which were filmed during the past year should be mentioned fur trade papers of Richard Chute and David Olmsted in the Ewing collection at Fort Wayne, Indiana; the entire Joseph N. Nicollet collection in the Library of Congress; the diary of a member of the Cass expedition of 1820, in private hands at Detroit; and the Flandrau Papers in the Indian office archives in Washington. Among important collections of original papers acquired during the year should be included the Civil War letters of Knute Nelson, the Henry Teigen collection, the papers of Charles L. Bartholomew, a Minneapolis cartoonist who was known as "Bart," the William Dean and Nathaniel P. Langford collections, and the papers of T. B. Sheldon and Company of Minneapolis, and important additions to the Lynn Haines and Sibley papers. Among records of organizations acquired are the papers of the Business Women's Holding Company of Minneapolis and an official list of Granges in Minnesota. Important products of the research of graduate students received in the manuscript division include a study of the Czechs in Minnesota and a history of agriculture in the state to 1885.

The library's search for items of historical interest resulted in the addition of 1,887 books and 678 pamphlets, about sixty-one per cent of which were received as gifts. In 1929, a far-seeing member of the society—Herschel V. Jones—established a trust fund the income from which was to be used for the acquisition of rare books, pamphlets, and papers, and for photographic reproductions of such materials. This has often proved a godsend to the society, and its usefulness has been demonstrated again this year. The filmslide copies of materials mentioned in the accessions of the manuscript division were obtained through the use of this fund, and it enabled the library to add to its collections such items as David W. Cartwright's *Natural History of Western Wild Animals*, published in 1875, M. Bell Irvine's *Report on the Red River Expedition of 1870*, a rare atlas of Ramsey County, an unusual book relating to the outlawed James brothers, and a report of the Minneapolis, Sault Ste.

Marie and Atlantic Railway Company for 1885, hitherto not represented in the society's library. Several years ago, a number of organizations began donating to the society books of more than ordinary interest, or funds for their purchase. From chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Colonial Dames, and other groups, important books have again been made available to the reading public. The society gratefully acknowledges the kindness of these friends.

Several hundred gifts representing many more than that number of publications poured into the newspaper department during the year. Of outstanding importance were such gifts as a file of the *Milan Standard*, covering the first three years of that paper's history, a valuable collection of Kenyon and Nerstrand newspapers, and a great mass of newspapers presented by Northwest Publications of St. Paul.

Gifts received for the society's museum have numbered 684. Their importance is great. Among them should be mentioned the interesting collection of American smoothbore muskets and rifles dating from 1834 to the present, received from Major Austin Corpe of Fort Snelling, which has been placed on display in the Fort Snelling Round Tower Museum. A large number of costumes and accessories, unusual pioneer household tools, reminders of the past wars in which the nation has engaged, and a striking collection of ecclesiastical and academic robes and honorary degree hoods that belonged to Bishop Henry B. Whipple are but a few of the gifts. The latter collection was presented by Whipple's granddaughters, Mrs. J. W. Burt and Mrs. B. W. Scandrett of St. Paul. Another interesting costume was used by a Lutheran clergyman; it consists of a coat, vest, and ruff, and was presented by Dean Blegen. Items reminiscent of the earliest days of Minnesota are represented in a gift received from members of the family of Colonel Josiah Snelling. It includes a silver watch, a silver mourning ring worn by Mrs. Snelling, and Snelling's commission as a lieutenant in the United States Army dated in 1808. The fur trade and Indian collections were enriched by the addition of such articles as an Assomption fur trade sash and an unusual painted elkhide robe. By far the most

extensive gift of the year was the tremendous collection of pictures from the library of the *St. Paul Daily News*. It includes some seventy-five thousand pictures and about twenty thousand mats. Sorting and arranging them has taken most of the time of three people during the past nine months.

The staff of the society has diligently continued to make its facilities available to the public. The newspaper department has kept up with its current work and has assimilated all the major gift collections. The library, despite loss of time through illnesses and leaves of absence, has kept its work creditably up to date. In the museum much time has been spent on indexing pictures and other additions to the collections. Nevertheless, forty-eight special exhibits were arranged. One new miniature group, depicting a Lake Minnetonka summer scene in the 1880's, has been completed and installed. Special loan exhibits were made available for several business houses, and during the summer and fall the society co-operated with the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art in presenting special exhibits of Minnesota art at these institutions. The manuscript division, which has experienced unprecedented expansion of its services to the public, has by strenuous effort and earnest application of its staff pushed its work of cataloguing and inventorying collections. It was even able to catalogue a collection of six hundred photostats of French maps, a task that required much time as well as a considerable knowledge of French, both old and modern.

Since 1919 the society has been custodian of the noncurrent state archives. An amendment to the Archives Law by the 1941 legislature widely extended the authority of the society over state and local archives and greatly increased its responsibilities. The amended law establishes standards for making and caring for public records, and it makes legal provision for copying, by photographic processes, records which are in danger of destruction through usage. It is of importance in this connection that the society has the duty of recommending the kind of photographic device that is to be used. Another noteworthy feature of the law is the provision for the regulated destruction of noncurrent, useless records under the super-

vision of the Minnesota Historical Society. Although the law adds to the work of the society, the new responsibility is accepted gladly, for it makes possible the regulation of permanent state and local records, a task which in future years will assume great importance.

Another law passed in 1941 which affects the society is that creating a Historic Sites and Markers Commission. Under its provisions, a commission composed of the director of state parks, the commissioner of highways, and the superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, or their representatives, is entrusted with supervising the erection of markers on historic sites in Minnesota.

The Historical Records Survey, under the direction of Mr. Jacob Hodnefield, has continued its record of substantial achievement. Thirteen inventories of county archives were published during the year, and progress was made on others. The results of the surveys in forty of Minnesota's eighty-seven counties have now been published.

During 1941 the WPA projects under the supervision of the society were reorganized. The work of the Historical Records Survey project was to continue as it had for the past several years, but arrangements were made for setting up two new projects, each of which was to assume specific tasks. A Historical and Archaeological Research Survey Project was organized to carry on research work in specialized fields under the co-sponsorship of the society, the department of state parks, the highway department, and the department of anthropology in the University of Minnesota. Its work was closely correlated with that of the Historic Sites and Markers Commission. Toward the close of the year, plans were made for the establishment, as a part of the Minnesota Art Project, of a state-wide museum assistance project under which not only the Minnesota Historical Society, but local societies throughout the state, would be able to do work not allowed under old WPA projects. The latter project has not yet gotten under way. Should the war bring about a cancellation of its plans, there is still a framework for a logically planned program of relief work to put into operation if the need for it arises.

Despite the pressure of work in an unusually busy year, members of the staff have actively engaged in research and other professional activities. They gave fifty-three addresses before groups whose mem-

bership was diverse and numerous. They prepared for publication in the society's quarterly and other journals numerous articles and reviews of books. They served on important committees of scholarly organizations, and two staff members taught history courses in Hamline University and the University of Minnesota. A number of changes in personnel have occurred during the year. The great burden of work in the manuscript division necessitated the addition of an extra worker to care for requests for census information. Miss Beatrice Edgar was assigned to that task, and Miss Phyllis Sweeley was employed as manuscript assistant. Mrs. Louise Blad, assistant in the museum, resigned her position in February, and Miss Henrietta Berge, who had been employed as stenographer in the library, was promoted to the position in the museum. Miss Rhoda Christensen was employed to take the place of Miss Berge. In the catalogue department, Miss June Day was granted a leave of absence for graduate work at the university. Miss Harriett Palin was employed temporarily to perform her work, but illness forced her to resign at the end of the year. In the general office, Mrs. Gladys Upham, office stenographer for the past several years, resigned on October 1, and her place was taken by Mrs. Florence K. Trelogan. Finally, it is with great regret that I announce that Miss Mary E. Palmes, who so faithfully has served as chief clerk for more than a quarter of a century, resigned her position on January 1. Members of both the executive council and the staff have been privileged to enjoy her friendship and the society as a whole has derived great benefit from her services through the years.

The legislature in its 1941 session appropriated \$32,520 for salaries for each year of the biennium, and \$13,000 for supplies. The total appropriations do not compare unfavorably with those for the previous biennium. The appropriations for materials and supplies, however, were reduced by \$1,000 per year, and those for salaries were increased by \$1,020 per year. Rising prices make the appropriation for supplies scarcely adequate to cover the society's minimum needs.

At the end of the calendar year, the society is faced with the problem of adjusting itself to the changed conditions of wartime. In

a world at war, its work has assumed a new gravity, and it is facing new problems. It is in institutions like the Minnesota Historical Society that we find reflected the development of American culture. Such institutions personify America and, through the re-creation of the past, give life and meaning to American civilization. Especially in a wartime world the Minnesota Historical Society and kindred organizations must take the lead in conserving the cultural resources of our civilization. In doing so, the society can also aid actively in the wartime functions of the nation, for a knowledge of history, which, in time of peace is a useful tool, in time of war becomes a powerful weapon.



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