

The 1942 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society

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THE NINETY-THIRD annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society on January 12 opened at 9:30 A. M. with the twenty-second annual conference on local history work in Minnesota, which was attended by about fifty people. Judge Julius Haycraft, vice-president of the society, who acted as chairman, recalled that he had presided also at the conference twelve years ago, in 1930, when there were only twenty local historical societies in the state. Now, he was happy to report, there are about sixty-five. He then introduced the first speaker, Mr. Harold W. Lathrop, director of Minnesota State Parks, who spoke on "The Historic Sites and Markers Commission of Minnesota." In explaining the need for such a commission, which was created by the legislature in 1941, Mr. Lathrop said that "the practice of commemorating historical events and marking historic sites had grown up and had remained a very haphazard process in Minnesota"; for there had been no general program, and no central organization to unify and direct activities. The result was "much confusion, some errors, some wasted effort, and even a certain amount of actual harm." It was not intended, he said, that the commission should replace quasi-public and private organizations that have been active in marking historic sites, but rather, that it should correlate, unify, and supervise their efforts, and give them aid. To indicate the nature of the commission's work, he reviewed briefly some of the actions taken since its organization in June, 1941, and outlined its policies and procedure.

Judge Haycraft commended the legislature for its action creating the commission and mentioned, as an example for the need of the guidance of such a body, a monument marking the site of old Fort Britt, which was originally placed a mile south of the actual site of the fort. Judge Haycraft himself dug it up and had it put in its

proper place. The next speaker on the program, Miss Bertha L. Heilbron, assistant editor of *Minnesota History*, described and compared local historical collections in the state which she has visited during the past few years, and pointed out the importance of local historical museums in helping to maintain national morale in the present crisis. Miss Heilbron's paper, under the title "Local Historical Museums and the War Program," is printed in this issue of *Minnesota History*.

After mentioning some museums that are not so well kept as those just described, the chairman introduced Edward Blomfield, executive secretary of the Hennepin County Historical Society, who discussed "A Publication Program for the Local Historical Society." Mr. Blomfield related some of the experiences of the Hennepin County society in its attempts to obtain publicity, and stressed the importance of the newspaper in a publication program for a county historical society. The Hennepin County society's first publication, which described the organization of the society, its purpose, and the collecting of articles for its museum, was written for the Minneapolis Centennial in 1939. "Thus," said Mr. Blomfield, "in taking advantage of an important event in the history of Minneapolis, it helped us to become better known." In the speaker's opinion, "the best method of acquainting the public with the activities of a local society" is "the bulletin," which can be made "a medium not only to impart information to its members, but also to influence the community of which it becomes a part." He mentioned the various types of materials that have been included in *Hennepin County History: A Quarterly Bulletin*, which was first issued by his society in April, 1941, and pointed out other materials that might be used appropriately in such a publication.

The role of the local historical society in a democracy at war was the subject discussed by the next speaker, Mr. G. Hubert Smith, supervisor of the museum unit of the Minnesota Art Project, whose paper also appears in the present issue of this magazine. Following Mr. Smith's paper, the chairman opened the meeting to discussion, calling first upon Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the state

society's museum. Mr. Babcock agreed with Mr. Smith's assertion that local historical activities should be increased in wartime, and suggested that a large part of the work of collecting day-by-day evidences of war activities could be done by county historical societies, which might perhaps work out special committees consisting of their entire memberships. The discussion was continued by Dr. Lewis Beeson, head of the newspaper department of the society. Mr. Beeson, whose remarks are printed in earlier pages of this issue of *Minnesota History*, pointed out specific records of war activities that should be collected by local historical societies and made some valuable suggestions as to the means of securing these records. In the audience was Mr. S. S. Beach, president of the McLeod County Historical Society, who remarked upon the importance of preserving copies of local newspapers; he had found, he said, nothing of such great value about the past of his community as what he had learned from the files of local papers.

The recent formation of a Minnesota committee for the conservation of cultural resources, with Dean Theodore C. Blegen as chairman, was announced by Dr. Arthur J. Larsen, superintendent of the state society. He pointed out that the pressure of war activities produces many changes in American life, and stressed the need for care lest the tangible reminders of the past be destroyed. He mentioned the drive for the collection and conservation of wastepaper and of iron, and he cautioned against including in collections of such discarded material papers or objects of historical value. After brief remarks by Mr. Henry N. Benson of St. Peter and Mr. Victor E. Lawson of Willmar, members of the state society's executive council, the conference was brought to a close.

About a hundred and thirty members and friends of the society attended the luncheon session, which was held at the Women's City Club in St. Paul. The chairman of the meeting was the president of the society, Mr. Ira C. Oehler, who expressed his satisfaction that the audience was so representative of the society's membership. Mr. Oehler first introduced Colonel Frank W. Matson, who presented to the society, on behalf of the grand lodge of Masons in Minnesota, copies of photographs of all the men who have been grand masters

in the state. These photographs are a part of the material that is being collected for the centennial of the organization of the grand lodge, which will occur in a few years. In accepting the photographs for the historical society, Mr. Oehler commended to other groups in the state the example set by the grand lodge of Masons. He then called upon Mr. Harold T. Hagg, professor of history at the Bemidji State Teachers College, whose paper on "Bemidji: The Story of a Frontier Minnesota Community" traced the early settlement and development of one of the last frontier areas of the state. This interesting presentation of a bit of regional history may be found elsewhere in the present issue of this magazine.

In introducing Dr. Grace Lee Nute, curator of manuscripts of the historical society, Mr. Oehler spoke of her latest book, *The Voyageur's Highway*, which, he noted, has done much to popularize history in Minnesota. It was on that subject — "Popularizing Minnesota History" — that Dr. Nute spoke. It had been her experience, she told the audience, that practically everyone is interested in local history; but, she continued, "everything depends upon the way it is presented." She went on to suggest a few of the regions in Minnesota that are waiting to have their stories told by someone who can tell them "simply and skillfully and entertainingly" — in such a way as to make the past of these regions live for the reader. The route of Highway 61, from its entrance to the state at La Crescent to the Canadian boundary near old Grand Portage, the Minnesota Valley, the Red River Valley, the iron ranges, Lake Minnetonka, the Root and Sauk river valleys, and the valley of the St. Croix were some of the regions that she would like to see treated historically as units. And in connection with each of these regions she gave her listeners glimpses of some of the fascinating people and events that had been part of its past. After thanking Dr. Nute, Mr. Oehler spoke of the advantage of placing historical records that are worthy of preservation — records such as the photographs presented by Colonel Matson — in a safe, fireproof building like that of the historical society.

The afternoon session, which was held in the auditorium of the Historical Building, was called to order at 3:00 P. M. by Mr. Oehler, who presided. About sixty-five people were in the audience. Annual

reports were read by the treasurer of the society, Julian B. Baird of St. Paul, and by the secretary and superintendent, Mr. Larsen, and the following thirty members of the society were elected to serve as members of the executive council during the triennium 1942-45: Dr. John M. Armstrong, Julian B. Baird, Henry N. Benson, Theodore C. Blegen, William H. Bovey, Kenneth G. Brill, Ralph Budd, the Reverend William Busch, Homer P. Clark, the Reverend James Connolly, William W. Cutler, Bert Fesler, Grace Flandrau, Guy Stanton Ford, Laura Furness, Edward C. Gale, Julius E. Haycraft, Louis W. Hill, Jr., Jefferson Jones, August C. Krey, Arthur J. Larsen, Victor E. Lawson, Albert J. Lobb, Andrew J. Newgren, Ira C. Oehler, L. A. Rossman, Lester B. Shippee, Charles Stees, Royal S. Stone, and Dr. Harry B. Zimmermann. Later in the afternoon the council met in the superintendent's office and elected the following officers: Lester B. Shippee, president; Julius E. Haycraft and Kenneth G. Brill, vice-presidents; Julian B. Baird, treasurer; and Arthur J. Larsen, secretary.

At the close of the business meeting, Mr. Richard R. Sackett, director of the Minnesota State-wide Archaeological and Historical Research Survey Project, spoke to the audience on "The Lac qui Parle Mission." After sketching briefly the colorful career of Joseph Renville, the trader who established Fort Renville at Lac qui Parle, and describing the work of the missionaries Williamson, Huggins, Riggs, Pond, and others who served there with the Sioux, Mr. Sackett traced the history of the efforts—in particular the efforts of the Chippewa County Historical Society—to preserve the site of the mission and to restore the chapel. The speaker commended the splendid work accomplished by the Chippewa County society in preserving for the people of the state a site so important historically.

Nearly five hundred people assembled in the auditorium of the Minnesota Museum of Natural History on the campus of the University of Minnesota at 8:00 P. M. for the program of the evening session. At this session, which was arranged under the sponsorship of the department of history of the university, the newly elected president of the society, Dr. Shippee, presided. Because his absence from the city made it impossible for the university's president, Dr.

Walter C. Coffey, to attend the meeting, he wrote a letter of greeting to the historical society, which was read by the chairman. Mr. Shippee then introduced Dr. Blegen, dean of the graduate school of the university, who addressed the audience on "The Minnesota Historical Society and the University of Minnesota." This address, which dealt with the tradition of close co-operation between the university and the historical society—a co-operation based upon an identity of ideals—is published in full in the first pages of this issue of *Minnesota History*. With the showing of "Minnesota Document," a motion picture of episodes in Minnesota history from 1863 to the present, which was produced at the University of Minnesota by the visual education service, the annual meeting was brought to a close.



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