

The Minnesota Historical Society in 1942¹

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THIS is the fourth war that the Minnesota Historical Society has witnessed since its establishment in 1849 by the first territorial legislature. Two of the three previous wars were great social, as well as military, struggles. The effects of both the Civil and the First World wars upon civilian life in Minnesota were in many ways comparable to that of the present world conflict.

The Civil War was preceded by a period of economic stagnation, ushered in by the panic of 1857, just as the present war was preceded by the depression of the 1930's. It is remarkable that the youthful historical society could survive the vicissitudes of the depression and the Civil War. Yet the minutes of the tenth annual meeting, held on March 5, 1860, indicate that the preceding years had been a period of progress. An "actuary" of the society was appointed in 1858, who "began to arrange and classify the collections of the society." The society's hall was daily kept open for visitors until July, 1859, when lack of funds forced its closing. During this period "large accessions to the collections of the society were made," their number being doubled. The minutes record the hope of the members, "now that the fever of speculation has subsided," that "the increased leisure of our citizens in various localities of the state will lead them to devote more attention to the gathering of material which will tend to preserve a knowledge of the aborigines, and hand down the names of the early settlers, with a history of their trials, successes and adventures."

With the outbreak of the war, many of the society's most active and interested members were called away for duty with the Union

¹ A revised version of a report presented at the afternoon session of the ninety-fourth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society in the Historical Building, St. Paul, on January 18, 1942. *Ed.*

army. Among them was its able and prolific secretary, the Reverend Edward D. Neill, who, in 1858, the year Minnesota became a state, had published his *History of Minnesota*. Neill resigned as secretary of the society to become chaplain of the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. Alfred J. Hill was appointed acting secretary, but Hill also enlisted and was detailed for duty in the topographic department of the United States Army at Washington.

For a while the society was quiescent. Then, in December, 1863, with the appointment of William H. Kelly as secretary, it underwent a revival. The minutes of the March 14, 1864, meeting of the executive council express the belief of its members that "it is a matter of congratulation that the society has chosen a most auspicious time for its resuscitation. So many thousands of our citizens have nobly volunteered their services in defense of the greatest and best government ever established, that in addition to collecting heroic incidents relating to the war, the archives of the society should contain the names of all who have enlisted, not forgetting a separate record of those who have laid down their lives that the millions who are to follow this generation may enjoy the blessings incident to an enlightened, free people."

The society emerged from the Civil War with increased vigor and with a vision of the services it could perform in collecting, preserving, and recording the history of the state. During the First World War this vision was given concrete expression in a manner which would have surprised the members of the Civil War era. The period of the First World War was one of intense activity and development for the society, under the leadership of the council and of Dr. Solon J. Buck, who became secretary and superintendent in 1914. The years 1917 and 1918, to quote Dr. Buck, "will be distinguished in the annals of the Minnesota Historical Society as having witnessed the completion, occupation, and dedication of the new building erected by the state for the specific purpose of furnishing a house for the society and a safe repository for its valuable possessions." In 1917 the society's appropriation from the legislature was enlarged, permitting an increase in the staff from sixteen in 1916 to

twenty-two at the end of 1917. The quarterly magazine established in 1915 continued with an increase in size. The society was preparing for publication a handbook describing its activities, the first volume of William W. Folwell's *History of Minnesota*, and Warren Upham's *Minnesota Geographic Names*. The library collections grew "at about the usual rate." There was a marked increase in the number of accessions to the museum, and "especial progress" was made in the manuscript division.

I have expressed the opinion that the Civil and First World wars affected life in Minnesota in a way comparable to the effects of the present struggle upon our social structure. Yet certainly we all realize that this war will change our manner of existence, our institutions, and our economic organization far more radically than did any other war. Institutions which will not adapt themselves to war conditions will have difficulty in surviving. Already the Minnesota Historical Society has begun this adaptation.

The society and its staff, I am proud to state, have gladly met every requirement of the state and federal war programs. The secretary and superintendent, Dr. Arthur J. Larsen, like Neill in the Civil War, volunteered, and on September 16 obtained a leave of absence for the duration of the war. He is now a first lieutenant in the Army Air Force and is engaged in foreign service. The Minnesota Manpower Commission's request for a twenty per cent reduction in the number of male classified civil service employees has been met by a release from civil service employment of a part-time employee.

The society has made a considerable financial sacrifice in order to pay its staff members the war salary increase of five dollars a month plus five per cent of their salary, which was authorized by Governor Stassen on July 1. In the current fiscal year the salary expenditures for those employees paid out of public funds, with the war salary increase, will exceed by over fifteen hundred dollars the state appropriation for salaries. The salary deficit has been made up, as the result of a rigid curtailment of expenditures, from the appropriation for supplies and expenses. Staff members paid out of private funds,

like those paid from state funds, have been given the war salary increase.

Because most of the available skilled structural steel workers are now engaged in war work, it has become virtually impossible to erect additional stacks in the society's building. This complicates immeasurably the serious problem of lack of space that confronts every division. Over a thousand bound newspaper volumes are now piled on the floor for lack of shelving. The museum staff has spent considerable time in the last few months consolidating and simplifying material in storage to conserve space; but despite all efforts to reduce bulk, the storage problem for the constantly growing collection is becoming increasingly acute, and the society may find it necessary to adopt an even more selective policy in accepting museum material than it has pursued in the past. The librarian reports that shelf space is at a premium both in the general reading room and in the stacks; and the manuscript division is faced with the same situation.

Lack of shelving has caused at least one major crisis, for shelf space in which to store archives is now entirely exhausted, and consequently the society has been forced to refuse to accept additional state records. In 1919 the legislature authorized the transfer to the society of noncurrent state and local records and made the society the custodian of such records. Two years ago the earlier law was amended, and the society was given the right to destroy records more than six years old that have no legal, administrative, or historical value. Under the law, however, the society is the only agency that has authority to destroy noncurrent archives, and both the society and the department in which the documents originate must keep adequate records of material destroyed. The legislation of 1941 was passed at a time when state records were being produced at a greatly accelerated rate, a time when state departments were needing more and more space for current records. Since they could not legally destroy noncurrent material, they flooded the society with requests for the transfer of records, turning over vast accumulations that by September, 1942, had filled all available stack space in the Historical

Building. Many state departments have been obliged to store in rented quarters archives that they cannot house or dispose of legally. Such quarters often are in damp basements, where valuable documents, arranged in inadequate filing containers, are exposed to hazards that may cause permanent damage. Fortunately, the law of 1941 provides that microfilm copies of archives, which would occupy very limited space, may be preserved in lieu of original records. Thus if microphotographic equipment for the filming of records were made available, the archives problem could be permanently solved.

As a result of the wartime reduction of travel, the 1942 summer meeting, usually an extended tour with programs at several places, was confined to a single session at Fort Snelling. The principle address, by Brigadier General Harold E. Wood, bore the title "The Shape of Things to Come."² The society's co-operation with the fort officials in maintaining the Round Tower Museum continued. The exhibits furnished by the society were changed three times during the year. They have served to familiarize thousands of soldiers from all parts of the Northwest with the story of Minnesota's earliest military post.

A substantial contribution to the war effort on the part of the individual members of the staff deserves commendation. For the purchase of war bonds, over eighteen hundred dollars have been deducted from their salaries, which, compared with those obtained elsewhere, are woefully small.

Largely as a result of wartime conditions, many more changes in personnel have occurred than in years past. Changes have been so extensive in the superintendent's office that no one employed at the end of 1941 was there at the end of 1942. Miss Mary E. Palmes, who has faithfully served the society as chief clerk under three superintendents, retired on December 31, 1941, and was succeeded by Mrs. Florence Trelogan. Dr. Lewis Beeson, curator of newspapers, in September became acting superintendent to serve during Dr. Larsen's absence. Miss Genevieve Hogan, the office stenographer, resigned and was replaced by Mrs. Phyllis Sandstrom. Mrs. Trelogan

² General Wood's address is published *ante*, 23:211-218.

was given a six months' leave of absence in September, and Mrs. Sandstrom became acting chief clerk. Miss Mary Dunkl was transferred in December from the manuscript division to the superintendent's office as stenographer.

Mr. Jacob Hodnefield, supervisor of the Minnesota Historical Records Survey until its termination in June, was appointed acting curator of newspapers and supervisor of the War History Committee on October 1. Mrs. Henrietta Erickson, museum assistant, left the society's employ in December, and was replaced by Mrs. Katharine Eberly.

On January 1, 1943, the only member of the manuscript division staff who had been there the preceding January 1 was the curator, Dr. Grace Lee Nute. Miss Catherine Bauman, assistant to the curator, resigned to be married, as did two other employees in the division, Miss Beatrice Edgar and Miss Caryl Johnson. Miss Phyllis Sweeley and Miss Dorothy Deutsch also resigned. Miss Bauman was succeeded by Miss Alma Jensen. Other new members of the manuscript division staff are Miss Ida Kramer, Miss Mary Spring, and Miss Eva Wood.

The library has had but one change in personnel, that caused by the resignation of Miss June Day, typist in the catalogue department, who was succeeded by Miss Muriel Hoppe. Although the library has suffered less than other departments from changes in personnel, it, too, has felt their effect; for it has fallen upon the library to supply other departments with help in emergencies. I wish to commend members of the library staff for the willingness with which they have filled vacancies in the museum, the newspaper department, the general office, and elsewhere.

One result of the changes in personnel, especially those which have affected the superintendent's office, has been an inability to issue the usual number of invitations to membership. Some memberships have been dropped because of the war, but the failure to extend invitations in sufficient number is probably largely responsible for a decrease of fifty-one in the total membership for 1942.

The society is blessed with a loyal and competent group of

workers. I wish to take this opportunity to thank them for their co-operation and help in making my task easier when I was suddenly called to assume the acting superintendency. I want in particular to thank Miss Palmes for returning to help Mrs. Sandstrom and me while we were both unfamiliar with the customary office practices and procedures.

Scholarship and professional activity usually are the first casualties of war. As the year drew toward its end, the limitation upon travel began to have its effect upon the number of talks and papers staff members were asked to give before clubs, local historical societies, and other organizations. During the year, approximately forty addresses were given by staff members. More than fifteen trips were made to present speeches, investigate and collect material, and attend meetings.

Typical of these activities was the participation by Miss Nute and the acting superintendent in a panel discussion on "The Preservation of Local History" held as a part of the farm bureau women's short course at the University Farm in September. The society was represented at the celebration of the centennial of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, held in connection with the fourteenth annual meeting of the North Shore Historical Assembly at Fort William on August 1, by Miss Nute, who spoke on the treaty and the voyageur, and by its vice-president, Judge Julius E. Haycraft. Miss Esther Jerabek, head of the accessions department, presented several talks and papers and served on the public documents committee of the Minnesota Library Association and as president of the Twin City Cataloguers' Round Table.

Volume 23 of the society's magazine, *Minnesota History*, consisting of four quarterly issues, appeared in 1942. Forty different authors contributed a total of fifty articles and reviews to the volume. Of this number, five — Mrs. Mary W. Berthel, Miss Bertha L. Heilbron, Miss Nute, Mr. Larsen, and the acting superintendent — are members of the society's staff. To meet the wartime need for conserving paper, a new and condensed type face was used. With the exception of the outside cover design, a revision of format accom-

panied the change of type. The new face made possible a ten per cent reduction in the number of pages in the volume without a corresponding reduction in the text. As many articles appear in volume 23 as were presented in volume 22, one more book review is included, and the note sections are considerably longer than those in the issues for 1941. Nevertheless, the four numbers have been reduced in length from 448 to 404 pages. When this difference is considered in terms of an edition of twenty-five hundred, it will be seen that the saving in paper is worthwhile. War themes have been featured in a number of articles published in 1942. Four articles in the March issue, for example, appear under the general title "Conserving Minnesota's History in Wartime." They were presented as addresses before the society's ninety-third annual meeting.

Twelve issues of the *Minnesota Historical News* appeared, the first five under the editorship of the acting superintendent, and the rest under Miss Heilbron. Notable was the publication by the society, for the Alvord Memorial Commission, of a volume of *Documents Relating to Northwest Missions*, edited with an introduction and notes by Miss Nute, who selected the documents and supplied the translations of the French originals. The difficult tasks of preparing the French and English text for publication, making the index, and seeing the book through the press were capably performed by Mrs. Berthel. I am pleased to report that since the appearance of the volume in November, more than seven hundred of the edition of a thousand copies have been sold.

The sale of another of the society's publications, Miss Nute's *The Voyageur's Highway*, has reflected the continued popularity of that work. In addition to writing articles and reviews, Miss Nute also finished her biography of Radisson, which is nearly ready for distribution by a New York publisher. At present she is engaged in the preparation of a volume on Lake Superior and the writing of a popular history of the St. Croix-Bayfield trail.

Fundamental to the productive activities of the society's patrons and staff are the "housekeeping" duties necessary to preserve, maintain, and make available for use its resources. These have been car-

ried on in a creditable manner during the year. During the first half of 1942, while WPA assistance was still available, large numbers of newspaper negatives were sorted and classified. Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, the curator of the museum, examined about thirty-three hundred negatives and selected approximately fifteen per cent for retention and incorporation in the permanent collection. Much attention was given to making the museum material more accessible through the regrouping of reserve collections and the expansion of various indexes. More than twenty-two hundred index and other cards were typed during the year. Among the materials indexed are transcripts of Minnesota travel accounts copied from Minnesota newspapers by WPA help under Mr. Babcock's direction.

Many large collections of papers, such as those of E. H. Hobe, Henry G. Teigan, Theodore B. Sheldon, Charles E. Dight, the St. Paul Fire Insurance Patrol, and the Upper Mississippi River Improvement Association, were arranged by the manuscript division. The important and intricate work of cataloguing manuscripts was advanced by Miss Bauman, Miss Sweeley, and Miss Kramer; they handled 361 manuscript accessions during the year. Among the large and valuable additions to the manuscript collections received in 1942 were a remarkable scientific collection, consisting of the papers of Richard Eames, state geologist and explorer of the North Shore of Lake Superior in the 1860's; and a large body of the archives of the Third United States Infantry.

All the 58 gifts of newspapers received in 1942 were assimilated with the regular files. The newspapers bound during the year numbered 783 volumes, including those rebound. In the library 388 volumes were bound, and 241 rebound. As volumes wear out, through use, rebinding becomes an increasingly important factor in maintaining the library's collection. Unfortunately the growing need for rebinding coincides with an increase in cost.

The work accomplished by the catalogue department of the library stands out chiefly in statistics, for the cataloguing of books and the making of catalogue cards and special lists, though essential to the operation of the library, disappears in the library shelves or in

the catalogue files. During the past year, 2,213 volumes were catalogued, and 17,138 typed, printed, and mimeographed cards were prepared. Of these 11,664 were added to the public catalogue. Four hundred and seventy cards represent records of special Minnesota interest in the Minnesota bibliography, author, and imprint files.

The society's collections were increased by numerous accessions of great value and interest. Among them is the voluminous file of "Minnesota Annals," a collection of about ninety thousand excerpts from Minnesota newspapers from 1849 to 1922, arranged under nearly two hundred subject headings. The "Annals," together with numerous manuscript accounts of Minnesota counties, cities, racial groups, and the like, in various stages of completion, were presented to the society by the Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration in Minnesota.

The newspaper collections were enriched by several valuable additions, among them two issues of a hitherto unknown St. Paul newspaper of 1860, the *North Star*; several unduplicated issues of the *Minnesota Statesman* of St. Peter for 1860; the *Minnesota Courier* of St. Cloud for 1862; the first issue of the *LaCrescent Plaindealer*, dated November 28, 1862; the first issue of the *Duluth Herald*, published on April 9, 1883; a file of the *Pine County Farmer* for the period from September 12, 1913, to August 28, 1914; issues of the *Rushford Star* for 1876 and 1877; and a large number of German newspapers published in South Dakota from 1883 to 1925, which, so far as is known, are not to be found in any other depository. The newspaper collection, which now numbers 21,626 volumes, was increased by 552 volumes in 1942.

A mine of information for the research worker in economic and social history was obtained from the St. Paul wholesale firm of G. Sommers and Company, when upon the termination of its business, a complete file of its catalogues, extending from 1882 to 1940, was presented to the society. In 1942 sixty-seven per cent of the 2,206 books and pamphlets accessioned were received as gifts. The number of volumes now in the library is 183,742, exclusive of newspapers. Individual items added to the library include a German edition of

Father Louis Hennepin's *New Discovery* published at Bremen in 1698; I. Winslow Ayer's *Life in the Wilds of America and Wonders of the West*, published in 1880; Richard Michaelis' *Die Ausiedler am Cottonwood Flusse*, bearing the date 1903; and a copy of "The Old Granite State," a song composed by members of the Hutchinson family in 1842. The Daughters of the American Revolution of Minnesota have shown their continued interest in the library by contributing to funds in memory of Mrs. Marshall Coolidge and Mrs. James T. Morris and by presenting books and D.A.R. records. Another organization actively interested in building up the library in special fields is the Minnesota division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. As in former years, Dr. Francis Palmer, registrar of the Minnesota diocese of the Protestant Episcopal church, has been active not only in increasing the Seabury-Tanner collection and in adding to the diocesan library, but in bringing in many an item for the general library.

An outstanding collection of lumber camp articles was received by the museum from the State Fair board. Peavies, canthooks, axes, stamp hammers, tools and equipment of the blacksmith's trade, articles characteristic of the bunkhouse, and many other pieces, numbering more than a hundred items, were included. Many additions were made to the collections of costumes, millinery, and dress accessories, and to the military and picture collections. Statistics do not describe the value of the accessions, but they do indicate the labor involved in accessioning, classifying, and filing the 1,257 museum specimens, 1,349 pictures, 522 negatives, 52 cuts, and numerous posters added by the museum during the year. The picture collection now amounts to 70,057 items.

The primary function of the society, that of collecting and preserving historical materials, has been increased by the war. The fact that nearly six hundred more museum specimens were received this year than last is in part a reflection of a tendency on the part of the general public to become historical-minded in times of war. The greatly accelerated production of records occasioned by war throws a tremendous burden on the library and newspaper departments in

particular. It is not until a war is over that manuscripts in great quantities are received. The society began the collection of materials relating to the present war long before the actual outbreak of hostilities, and it has continued to collect them; but with the establishment of the Minnesota War History Committee by Governor Stassen in May as an agency of the Minnesota Office of Civilian Defense, the problem was simplified. The establishment of such an organization was urged by the superintendent and others. Experience in the First World War had taught states with progressive historical societies that a single organization, with the sole objective of collecting war records, can perform the work more effectively than existing institutions. When the War History Committee was established, the society was designated to appoint a director and to furnish office space. The curator of newspapers became director and secretary of the committee. After he was appointed acting superintendent of the society, the acting curator of newspapers, Mr. Jacob Hodnefield, was named supervisor of the work of the committee. The work and policies of the committee are described *ante*, 23:149-153. Its co-operation with the society has been extensive and satisfactory. The library is collecting certain works of general reference necessary for research on the war; and the custody of certain materials, such as periodicals, newspapers, and posters, is given to the society, which is better equipped to care for these records than the committee.

The first year of the war has caused a marked decrease in the use of the society's facilities, as might be expected, except for those of the manuscript division. Only 3,818 people came to the library reading room in 1942, while in 1941 there were 6,307. This year 2,205 readers used newspapers; last year 3,393 persons visited the department. The 1942 total of approximately 35,000 museum visitors was a decrease of 5,000 from the 1941 total. Readers in the manuscript division, however, numbered 7,867, more than double the 1941 total of 3,165. This increase is accounted for by the tremendous demand for information from the census records, 7,189 of the manuscript readers being census users. From two to four persons in the

manuscript division have given all their time to census work throughout the year.

Aside from the fact that numerous potential users of the society's resources are in military service or engaged in some kind of war work, or are unable to visit the society because of travel restrictions, there are two other reasons for the decrease in readers, and both of them stem from the war. All WPA projects began to taper off in January and were ended in June. WPA workers who were employed on projects not sponsored by the society, but who used the society's facilities, formed a high proportion of the readers in the newspaper department and the library during the depression years. Forty-two per cent of the library readers in 1941, for instance, were WPA workers. Their absence alone would account for the decrease in the use of that department in the past year. There has also been a decrease this year in the number of genealogists, students, research workers, and museum visitors because, in conformity with state civil service regulations, the society's building is closed on Saturday afternoons.

Insofar as the decrease in readers is attributable to the cessation of WPA work, it represents a return to normal reader demand. As long as the society holds the research worker, the student, the genealogist, and the local historian, it is on a sound basis. For approximately eight years it fell upon the society's staff to care for a great increase in readers without an increase in personnel. This was detrimental to the long-range interests of the society, for it meant that staff members had little or no time for research, writing, and production of their own. The decrease in readers, then, should be regarded as a return to the old standards—to the old ratio of readers to staff members—which should enable staff members to increase their scholarly productivity, thereby enhancing their value to the state.

WPA programs sponsored by the society ended in June with the transfer of all WPA activity to work directly connected with the war. Space does not permit me to recapitulate the valuable accomplishments of the varied types of historical work performed by WPA

workers, but in retrospect it appears that much of the considerable success achieved by the society's WPA program was due to the careful preliminary planning of the work and to the intimate supervision given to the workers. The society was fortunate in the relatively high caliber of the workers assigned to it.

This year truly has been a year of change, as the superintendent predicted in his report for 1941. The society must expect greater changes in the future, must make greater adaptations while the war lasts, if it is to survive. The world is engaged in a great clash of ideas, requiring a new estimate of all values. All institutions are being tested by the war. Archibald MacLeish has stated that "the city of the mind" is the ultimate objective of the forces against which we fight. All cultural institutions are the object of attack by our enemies. Because this is a war of ideas and beliefs, the Nazis acquired control of local historical museums in Germany and made use of them as mediums of propaganda to prepare the people for Hitler's rise to power.

But historical societies can be a rallying point, a citadel for democracy. By helping to fill a basic human hunger for pride in locality, for awareness of the past, for familiarity with immediate surroundings, they can assist in creating a sense of common participation in a common spiritual and cultural tradition and thus build up a defense against barbarism. Historians can be too remote, too removed from the wellsprings of belief and action. The diffusion of knowledge about antiquity or about international political relations too frequently fails to arouse a response in feeling, understanding, and action because it is not connected with immediate experience.

In teaching Minnesota history I have found that the better and more extensive is a person's acquaintance with the history of his locality, the better he appreciates international problems. Unquestionably the problem of co-operation among nations is one we will have to solve. An individual who realizes what has been accomplished in Minnesota through co-operation between racial groups and their assimilation into one homogeneous whole has a clearer understanding of the problem on an international scale. As people

acquire a more complete knowledge of local history, they will be better citizens of a national and an international state.

The Minnesota Historical Society can adjust itself to wartime conditions not only by economizing on expenditures, by adapting itself to fewer readers, and by collecting war records, but also by reaching out to the people of the state and acquainting them with their history, by stimulating and guiding local historical activity, and by encouraging and increasing sound historical work.

I am not afraid of the effect of the war upon the society. I regard the present as a time when the society's usefulness may be increased. There will be problems of adjustment and the assumption of new obligations. These problems a going institution such as this society can solve.



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