

## The 1944 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society

THREE SESSIONS—a luncheon, a business meeting, and an evening gathering—constituted the ninety-fifth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society, which was held in St. Paul on January 10, 1944. In view of the difficulties of transportation under wartime conditions, the local history conference, which was a regular morning feature of the society's annual meetings before 1943, and which attracted to St. Paul leaders of local historical societies from all sections of the state, was omitted. The 1944 program, therefore, opened with a luncheon in the auditorium of the Women's City Club of St. Paul, where about a hundred and twenty-five members and friends of the society assembled at 12:00 A.M. It is gratifying to be able to report that the audience included not only residents of the Twin Cities, but a number of interested people from other parts of the state.

After a few remarks about the society's fast-approaching centennial and the significance of its early organization, Judge Julius E. Haycraft, who presided, introduced the speaker, Dr. Grace Lee Nute, curator of manuscripts on the society's staff. Her subject, "The Lake That Is Superior," Judge Haycraft informed the audience, was chosen because Miss Nute recently completed a book about this largest of the Great Lakes. It was written in response to an invitation to contribute to a series, similar to the *Rivers of America*, dealing with the huge inland seas that border the United States and Canada.

Miss Nute began by raising the question "whether there really is any basis for the word 'superior' when attached" to the lake. After discussing its geology, its ore deposits, its grain shipments, and the unique boats that ply its waters, the speaker answered her question in part by asserting that Lake Superior "is the biggest, the deepest, the coldest lake of any size; it has the chief deposits of commercial iron ore; it sends a volume of trade through the Sault locks greater

than that of any three of the other canals of the world combined; and on its shores lies the greatest grain port of the world—Fort William-Port Arthur.” From commercial considerations, the speaker turned to the realm of literature, giving special emphasis to the Chippewa folk tales that reached fruition in the “completely native” narrative verse of Longfellow, and mentioning the poet’s debt not only to the Indians, but to Henry R. Schoolcraft, who recorded in great detail the legends of the hero Nanabazhoo. In the field of culture, also, Miss Nute mentioned the pioneer artists who left pictorial records of the Lake Superior scene and its natives—Leon Lundmark, Paul Kane, Peter Rindisbacher, and Eastman Johnson. In considering a final feature of her subject’s superiority, the speaker declared that any impartial person must “give the palm for scenic beauty to Lake Superior.” All this evidence of the lake’s superlative qualities, however, was followed by an anticlimax, for in concluding Miss Nute pointed out that the name “is only a faulty translation” of the “Lac Superieur” of the early French explorers, who called this inland sea the “upper lake” in order to draw attention to its geographical location beyond Lake Huron.

About forty people were in attendance when the business session convened in the auditorium of the Historical Building at 3:15 p. m. Judge Haycraft, who again served as chairman, asked Dr. Lewis Beeson, the society’s acting superintendent, to read the minutes of the last meeting, and then called for memorials of two members of the executive council who died during the past year. The first, which was presented by Mr. William E. Cutler of St. Paul, commemorated the services and reviewed the career of the late Edward C. Gale of Minneapolis. Lawyer, traveler, book collector, and civic leader, Mr. Gale was a member of the society’s council from 1927 until his death on September 12, 1943, and he served as its president from 1936 to 1939. The subject of the second memorial was William H. Bovey, long a leader in the flour milling industry of Minneapolis, whose membership on the council extended from 1939 to April 26, 1943. His memorial was read by Judge Kenneth G. Brill of St. Paul. Judge James E. Montague of Crookston and Mr. Bergmann Richards of Minneapolis were unanimously elected to the executive

council to fill the vacancies left by the deaths of Mr. Gale and Mr. Bovey. Following the election, the report of the treasurer was read. Since Mr. Julian B. Baird, who fills that office, was unable to be present, his report was read by another member of the council, Mr. L. A. Rossman of Grand Rapids.

To conclude the business meeting, Dr. Beeson presented his annual report. It appears in full elsewhere in this issue of *Minnesota History*. Unlike many of the reports of the society's superintendents in years past, the current statement deals not only with the organization's accomplishments during the preceding year, but with its plans for the future, particularly in the postwar period. The many concrete suggestions for future activity made by Dr. Beeson provoked a spirited discussion among members of the audience. Mr. Rossman began by expressing regret that the society has only sixteen hundred members; the number, he believes, should approach as many thousand, and there should be general participation in the society's activities on the part of the public. His theme was continued by Mrs. Grace Flandrau of St. Paul, who voiced the need for an organized membership drive. Judge Brill suggested that exhibits, talks, and meetings directed to special professional groups might serve to stimulate membership. The organization of a committee to study ways and means of increasing membership was suggested by Professor August C. Krey of the University of Minnesota, who added the idea that greater co-operation with the schools would increase the society's sphere of activity. A state-wide local history essay contest, said Dr. Krey, would be a step in the right direction. Mr. Robert S. Scott, superintendent of schools in Hennepin County, told of a Minnesota quiz in which some seven thousand school children participate each year, with the winners entering a final contest at the Minnesota State Fair, and he mentioned a special local history project that is being developed at Richfield. He then inquired about the possibility of a children's membership in the Minnesota Historical Society. Junior memberships, said the Reverend Leland R. Cooper of Minneapolis, have long been used by a Milwaukee museum, with significant returns in adult interest and membership.

The annual address, which was presented by Professor Laurence

Schmeckebier of the department of fine arts in the University of Minnesota, was the feature of the evening session in the auditorium of the Historical Building. Some seventy people heard his stimulating discussion of "Art on Main Street"; others will have an opportunity to read it in the present issue of this magazine. Professor Schmeckebier followed his address with a series of slides of frontier houses and other structures in St. Paul and Minneapolis—the concrete evidence of the Main Street art that is fast disappearing from the local scene. Unfortunately, lack of adequate funds to meet the rapidly rising cost of printing makes it impossible to reproduce the more than twenty views displayed and explained by the speaker. Among the structures illustrated were the house built by Governor Alexander Ramsey in St. Paul in 1872, one of the few pioneer buildings to be still maintained in something approaching its original state; the log chapel built on the site of St. Paul by Father Galtier in 1841; the house built by Alpheus Fuller in 1854 and later occupied by Judge Emmett, which stood in St. Paul until 1942; Daniel A. Robertson's house in 1860 and in its present dilapidated state; and the customhouse which occupied a St. Paul corner from 1868 to 1939. The speaker implied that the preservation of such buildings would enrich people's lives and help them understand their backgrounds, as well as beautify the community.

Illustrative of Professor Schmeckebier's theme, also, was the exhibit that had been installed in the auditorium for the meeting, to which he called attention upon concluding his remarks. It consisted of twenty-five pictures of old Stillwater, painted in water color by Miss Josephine Lutz, instructor in art education in the University of Minnesota. Most of her pictures represent houses or business structures erected in the pioneer period and still standing. By recording Stillwater's architectural beauty, Miss Lutz has perpetuated one aspect of the city's cultural heritage and has made a substantial contribution to the cause of state and local history. Many of those present lingered to examine and enjoy her pictures before leaving the meeting.

B. L. H.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).