

Minnesota History and the Schools

THE WATERVILLE JUNIOR HISTORIANS¹

Betty Merle Miller

I CONSIDER it a privilege to represent the Waterville Junior Historians. On behalf of our chapter, I wish to express appreciation for the recognition that came to our school when I was asked to present to you at this meeting a brief summary of the activities of our organization.

Several factors led to the development of interest and the organization of our chapter. The letter sent out by the Minnesota Historical Society to the schools was put into the hands of various groups of pupils by our sponsor, Miss Sadie Rosenau, to acquaint us with the junior movement. The eighth-grade project of last year on the "History of Waterville" stimulated interest further. The possibilities for an organization and its probable objectives were discussed in our history classes. Later Miss Rosenau gave the members of the history classes an opportunity to sign up if they were interested and to state the days they were free during the sixth period. Two divisions are scheduled during school hours to avoid conflicts with other activities.

Plans were made for: (1) organizing a publicity committee to prepare articles for the school paper and to plan any other publicity that might be necessary; (2) appointing an exhibits committee to have charge of articles of historical value that would be on display from time to time; (3) preparing an exhibit of articles brought home by the boys who served in World War II; (4) presenting a program which was talked over, but which to date is the only objective discussed but not accomplished; (5) learning the Minnesota state song; and (6) preparing a booklet on the part that servicemen and women of our community had in World War II. To these objectives we now

¹This report was prepared and read by Miss Miller, a member of the Waterville Junior Historian chapter, before the luncheon session of the local history conference held under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul on April 12 (see *post*, p. 146). An account of a local history project conducted at Waterville in 1944-45 was contributed by the sponsor of the local chapter to the issue of this magazine for December, 1945. *Ed.*

add a seventh, and that is to make a trip to St. Paul to visit the State Capitol and the Minnesota Historical Society's museum on April 22.

The most important plan called for the making of the booklet, which includes the names of about three hundred servicemen and women of the Waterville community, and the graduates of the Waterville High School who are on the honor roll from near-by Elysian. The Waterville list was obtained from the American Legion Women's Auxiliary, which kept a record for the local roll of honor. One of the pupils from Elysian made a list of the names on the honor roll there and checked it against the list of students who have graduated from the Waterville High School. One of the first problems was to decide on the information we wished to have and to find out how it could be obtained. The need for a simple data form was decided on, with spaces for the name, residence, rating, places of training, time of discharge, or present assignment of each person, and a place where he could describe briefly an interesting experience.

Committees were named by the booklet co-chairmen to index the names, and writers were chosen to put the data into paragraph form. A request was made that all who could type should help in this work. Members of the Junior Historian chapter volunteered to interview or write letters to servicemen and women or to members of their families to obtain information. Non-members of the chapter also volunteered to help us. After they had completed their work, a few names remained, and these were placed on the blackboard. All pupils were asked to see if there was any way to find out about the services of the people on this list. In this manner we were able to get reports on all but a few of the men. Recognition has been given to all by entering their names in the booklet.

The writers accomplished their part of the project during free school periods. Our sponsor corrected the paragraphs they wrote and checked them with the data given. The commercial teacher allowed members of the chapter credit for the typing and stenciling done in preparing the booklet. Each pupil took one letter of the alphabet and, in order, typed the accounts written. These were then checked against the original data sheet, paged by two of the members, and rechecked by our sponsor. It was then possible to get an approximate idea of

what our book would be like and the information was retyped by pages. Our sponsor again checked the material against the original data form. Lack of experience in stenciling has caused the work to move slowly.

The president of the organization has written a brief introduction calling attention to asterisks or stars in the Waterville section to indicate those who graduated from the local school. The names of those who died in the service are underlined. The co-chairmen of the booklet committee provided a brief paragraph of acknowledgements. The table of contents was prepared by one of the booklet chairmen. It lists the names of servicemen with the reporter for each. The stenciling is not quite completed. Our book when completed will contain about eighty pages, double-spaced, typed on one side. The boys of the ninth and tenth grades who are members of the chapter will put the booklet together. A sales committee was appointed and to date its members have sold forty-six copies at thirty cents a copy. Our goal is to sell a hundred copies and thus pay our expenses, with possibly enough left to buy a book for the school library.

We feel that the Junior Historian organization has been worthwhile. Co-operation was developed among the pupils working on the project. The value of teamwork, as compared with each trying to be a star, was clearly demonstrated. Each member had something to do. We also feel that the work done has historical value which may increase with the years.

The eagerness of the chapter members to make the trip to St. Paul indicates that an interest in historical values has been developed. In talking with Mr. Mahler, our school superintendent, about our organization, we found that he appreciated our project and thought it to be of great historical value.

It may be of interest to some of you to come to Waterville and examine the report of the publicity and exhibit committees of our organization and the draft of our booklet. I will be glad to try to answer any question you may have about our work, or our sponsor, Miss Rosenau, who is present today, may be able to give you a more definite answer. It has been her effort that has made our organization possible and worthwhile.



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