

The Minnesota Historical Society in 1946

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THE PAST YEAR was one of adjustment. On the national scene, and in everyday life, it was a period of attempted return to the accustomed routine of peacetime, a task which many found difficult and troublesome. The same difficulties which beset the individual have confronted the society. High prices for goods and services, the rising cost of living, scarcities of important materials, the dislocations of a wartime economy slowly returning to a peacetime norm have hit this society as they have its members.

There are, however, many indications that the society has met the challenge of the times successfully. In the museum, for example, the flow of visitors resembles the stream of prewar years. An aggressive program of newspaper co-operation which brought the society more publicity in 1946 than in all the years from 1939 to 1945, and a constantly changing series of new and interesting museum exhibits have attracted numerous visitors from all over this and neighboring states, and even from remote parts of the world. In the library and manuscript division reading rooms the number of users of the collections still is below the peak of the prewar period, but the past year showed a substantial gain over 1945. The newspaper department is constantly occupied by a host of busy readers engaged in research work of all kinds. If anything, the newspaper collections were more heavily used during 1946 than during any normal previous year. During the war years the society adjusted its work days to the schedules of other state offices insofar as that was possible. All departments, accordingly, were closed on Saturday afternoons. As the year drew to a close attempts were being made to adjust the working schedule to permit a full six-day week. It was felt that students as well as business people would appreciate the additional half day of public service.

At the beginning of 1946, the total membership stood at 1,700. During the year new members were added, and former members were reinstated at a rate of one a day, for a total of 364 new personal memberships. If we add to this list of new members the number of new institutional and subscribing members, the total of additions to the membership rolls was 411. Deaths of 47 members and the dropping of others for nonpayment of dues reduced the margin of growth to 279. The membership on December 31, 1946, stood at 1,979.

Besides the active members of the society, however, there are two other groups of individuals who form an associative membership. In the past quarter century there has sprung up in this state an active and vigorous group of county or local historical societies. At the close of the year sixty-five such organizations had been established in this state with a membership reaching into the thousands. Although the members of such organizations are not necessarily active members of the Minnesota Historical Society, the local societies themselves are affiliated with this institution, and they work out their programs in co-operation with, and under the supervision of, the society. Such members think of themselves as a part of the great historical machine in this state, as indeed they are.

Another group in which this society is greatly interested is the Junior Historical Society. This organization, established during 1945, has achieved a vigorous growth in the two short years of its existence. Several hundred enthusiastic Junior Historians, operating in chapters with from seven or eight to forty or fifty members, are engaged in an intelligent program of studying the backgrounds of their communities, their state, and their national and racial inheritances.

The membership of the society's governing body—the executive council—remained substantially the same during the year. At the annual meeting of the council in January, 1946, the Honorable Clarence R. Magney, associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, was elected to fill the vacancy caused by the death in December, 1945, of Dr. John M. Armstrong. As the year drew to its end, the council reluctantly accepted the resignation of Mr. William W.

Cutler, past president of the society, who was compelled to withdraw because of his health.

During the past two years various phases of the work of the society have been guided by committees of its members. These committees have continued to function throughout the year with but one major change in personnel. In September, Professor Laurence E. Schmeckebier, chairman of the committee on the preservation of historic buildings, resigned his chairmanship upon removing from Minnesota.

The membership of the staff of the society, on the other hand, underwent many changes and was expanded considerably to provide for new services and to adjust to new circumstances. In April Mr. Russell F. Barnes, who, until his entry into the armed forces during the war, was on the staff of the New York Public Library, was appointed to the position of librarian vacated in December, 1945, when Miss Gertrude Krausnick resigned. In January, following the retirement of Mr. Jacob Hodnefield, Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, since 1919 curator of the society's museum, assumed charge of the important newspaper collection. He is assisted by Mr. Leo Malack. At the same time, Mr. G. Hubert Smith assumed the duties of curator of the museum. In March, Dr. Grace Lee Nute, who had been curator of manuscripts for the society since 1921, was relieved of her administrative duties and appointed to the newly created position of research associate in order that she might concentrate her attention on research and writing. The duties of curator of manuscripts were transferred to the librarian, under whose direction Miss Catherine Flinspach continues to administer the manuscript collections of the society.

Two new and extensive projects undertaken by the society have necessitated the addition of new staff members. In June work was begun on the history of public health in Minnesota with Dr. Philip D. Jordan as director of the public health project and research associate. Assisting him are Miss Clodaugh Neiderheiser, Mrs. Lois Dolan, Mrs. Ruth M. Larsen, and Mrs. Eleanor M. Fisk. In the late summer months, Dr. Rodney C. Loehr was appointed research associate of the society and director of the newly established Forest

Products History Foundation. Associated with Dr. Loehr are Mr. George Engberg, research fellow, and Miss Lucile Kane and Mrs. David Willson, research assistants. Mrs. Mary McKenney of the catalogue division of the library was assigned to catalogue materials for this project, and Mrs. Blanche Severe was transferred from the reference division to the catalogue department to succeed Mrs. McKenney. Miss Lorraine Wood was appointed reference assistant. Stenographic assistance has been subject to fluctuations and changes in accordance with changing needs and circumstances. To care for the new projects, two new stenographic positions were created.

The new activities planned for the society made extensive adjustments in working space necessary during the past year. It was fortunate that the room formerly used by the American Legion was vacated in November, 1945, and available for use. The acquisitions and cataloguing activities of the library, formerly carried on in somewhat widely separated parts of the building, were housed in these new and roomy quarters. The rooms formerly used by the catalogue department were taken over for use by the general office of the society. A new and attractive reception room, with room for special library and museum exhibits, was thus established, and adequate quarters provided for the stenographic staff of the society. The editorial department took over the old general office quarters, and the room formerly occupied by the accessions division was split. In one section, by the aid of temporary partitions, offices were established for the public health project personnel. The remaining half was converted into a map room for the library. The offices formerly occupied by the editorial department were assigned to Dr. Nute and her staff engaged in editorial work of the Alvord Memorial Commission. One office of this suite and an adjoining office formerly used for museum display purposes were assigned to personnel of the Forest Products History Foundation. The adjustments in space were designed to improve efficiency and increase working comfort and convenience.

The routine work of the society was carried on at an accelerated pace despite the numerous changes in personnel and the dislocations of moving. The library reports indicate that it is making steady

progress in the tremendous but unspectacular task of investigating, acquiring, and preparing for use by readers the books and printed materials which constitute the life of a library. The accessions department, which begins the process by investigating titles and carries through the task of acquiring books, pamphlets, documents, and magazines, reports that it made more progress during 1946 than at any time since 1929, except in 1935, when its staff was augmented by eight WPA assistants. The catalogue division reports that it catalogued more titles and more volumes than during 1945, and that it made substantial inroads on the backlog of accumulated, uncatalogued materials. The newspaper division similarly reflects a tendency to keep up with current work, despite the fact that the entire personnel of the division was new. The manuscript division added a hundred and fifteen new collections to its resources, and made substantial progress toward its objective of cataloguing the mass of materials not previously shown in the card catalogue. Major achievements were the practical conclusion of the tasks of cataloguing the manuscript map collection and the autograph collection. The museum received ninety-seven groups of new museum objects, totalling nearly three hundred items, during the year, and made a promising start in the monumental task of redesigning and changing the exhibit rooms.

With each passing year, new opportunities for public service are opened to the society. During the autumn of 1945, the Mayo Properties, Inc., of Rochester presented the society with a gift of \$25,000 to finance a study of the history of public health in the state. Under the terms of this gift, technical supervision rests with Dean Blegen of the graduate school and with the department of history of the University of Minnesota, and the work is directed by a member of its faculty, Professor Jordan of the department of history. The compilation of information, at best a long and laborious job, is progressing in a very satisfactory manner. Present plans call for publication in the autumn of 1948.

This gift emphasizes that the Minnesota Historical Society is not only a repository of information, but a center for research and publication as well. That function of the society was accented during

the past year by another significant development — the establishment at the society of the Forest Products History Foundation. The importance of the forests of Minnesota long has been accepted. Historically, they have been of more than local importance, for the products of Minnesota's forests helped to build the homes of the western prairies during the march of white civilization to the West. From its forests has come paper to print a nation's newspapers. They have furnished a variety of wood products. In the march of the lumbermen across the continent, Minnesota furnished more than its share of leaders, and more than a proportionate share of the personnel in the contemporary industry is Minnesota born, or had a Minnesota experience. Even though the forests of Minnesota are commonly described as something of the past, they still furnish the materials for an extensive and progressive industry within this state.

There is no one place in the nation where any considerable mass of information about the past and present industry can be found. No extensive research or publication programs have been undertaken for the industry. It is an untilled field. These conditions and the importance of the industry in the development of Minnesota led a group of Minnesota scholars and businessmen to consider a plan for the establishment of a national center in which information about the industry for the whole continent could eventually be assembled, and from which could issue in published form authentic and interesting information about the industry. The Weyerhaeuser family, long outstanding in the industry, furnished the financial backing for a preliminary three-year program of inventory, collection, and study of the source materials, and the program was inaugurated as the Forest Products History Foundation of the Minnesota Historical Society, with Dr. Lochr, a member of the history faculty of the University of Minnesota, as director. To insure that the program laid out is adequate, and to obtain the advice and assistance of informed and interested men, an advisory committee has been established under the auspices of the society to assist in the work. The present committee, with Dean Henry Schmitz of the University of Minnesota college of agriculture, forestry, and home economics as chairman, has the following additional members: Fred-

erick K. Weyerhaeuser of St. Paul, David M. Winton and Paul Eames of Minneapolis, and Corydon Wagner of Tacoma. As the work develops, it is planned that this committee shall add to its membership. It is an ambitious and far-reaching program which this foundation has begun, and it may point the way to a future service of vast importance for the society.

The society made a notable step forward in the field of publication during the year. The cover of the quarterly magazine, *Minnesota History*, was completely redesigned, and issued in a series of four strikingly handsome colors. The new cover gives emphasis to the centennial of the territory and of the society in 1949. We believe that its contents remain at the high level of scholarship and interest set for it by Dr. Buck and Dean Blegen. Certainly, among the authors represented in its pages are scholars of national renown. Three articles appearing in it were deemed of such merit by special groups that they were reprinted and issued as separates for the organizations interested. In 1946 for the first time the contents of *Minnesota History* were copyrighted.

A great volume of interesting and valuable documentary and other material telling the story of Minnesota's development that has awaited publication for many years has been a source of reproach to the society. Scarcity of funds for the purpose has prevented the publication of any but occasional manuscripts. Through the kindness of a friend, *Minnesota under Four Flags* was published. At the close of the year, another gift for publication was received in the form of a check for \$4,500 from the Oliver Mining Company, through Mr. Elmer Blu. This sum will help the society publish the valuable history of iron mining in Minnesota which Dr. Nute has had in preparation for the past several years.

A volume of a unique character was published during the year. It bears the title *Minnesota: The North Star State in Pictures*. It is not that the book itself is pretentious; rather, it is the nature of the contents and the way in which it was published which have special meaning. The book is not a strictly historical record of Minnesota. It seeks to preserve through pictures significant and typical scenes of Minnesota which may have future historical significance. Thus, we

seek to interpret Minnesota's present for future generations. This interesting little book was published for the society by the Itasca Press of the Webb Publishing Company, and it is the first in a series planned for publication under the same arrangement. Thus it will be possible to publish many books worthy of preservation, but for which the necessary capital is not available.

Two new periodical publications were begun during the year. For the benefit of the rapidly growing Junior Historical Society, the first number of the *Gopher Historian*, a mimeographed publication, was issued in November. Publication on a basis of six issues during a school year is planned, and as soon as funds are available, the magazine will be printed. In recognition of a need to keep in closer contact with the members of the society, an informal, somewhat personal monthly bulletin called *News for Members* was established. In it are published timely notices, news about members, interesting items about new materials available for users of the society, and communications which should be called to the attention of its members.

Much time and effort has been given to the preparation of proper plans for the observance of the centennial of Minnesota's establishment as a territory, which will occur in 1949. In February, 1946, the Minnesota Historical Society was designated by Governor Thye as the official planning agency for that purpose. Under the mandate of the governor's instructions, the society has prepared a plan for submission to the legislature during the 1947 session. The plan calls for a state-wide commemorative program, one in which all sections of the state and all its people can participate. If carried out, the centennial should be an occasion for a state-wide inventory of achievements and resources, spiritual, human, and material.

One more major problem remained to be solved as the year drew to a close. It was occasioned by the fact that Fort Snelling, which from the time of its establishment in 1819 right up to our very present has stood for all the rich heritage of the past, ceased to exist as a military installation on October 14, 1946. Not only was an important link with the historic past severed by this event; it posed a new problem for the society, which in 1940 joined with the military authori-

ties at Fort Snelling to operate a museum in the Round Tower. The fort furnished heat, light, guard service, and a custodian; the society furnished exhibits and saw that they were correctly installed and rotated. The Round Tower Museum was popular with visitors to the area during the six years it was thus administered. The Veterans' Administration, which took over the fort, however, has been unable to live up to the conditions laid down by the military authorities. It is willing to furnish heat and light for the museum and provide a general guard service. The intricacies of federal civil service, however, prevents the Veterans' Administration from providing the receptionist necessary to permit public use of the museum. The society, on its part, has no funds to employ one. The society and the Veterans' Administration are seeking a solution for the problem through voluntary assistance, through the aid of special groups, or through gifts from private individuals.



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