

# The Minnesota Historical Society in 1947<sup>1</sup>

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IN THE AUGUST, 1947, issue of the Minnesota Historical Society's monthly *News for Members* there was printed "A Message from the New Superintendent" the first paragraph of which warrants quotation by way of introduction to this report: "There has been a 'great tradition' at the Minnesota Historical Society dating back to the year of the establishment of both the society and the territory in 1849. This 'great tradition' includes many elements and personalities. One may single out four elements of the 'great tradition' for special mention: First, a high degree of institutional integrity and loyalty; second, an infectious enthusiasm for the history of Minnesota and the Upper Midwest; third, a high level of technical competence and historical craftsmanship on the part of the staff; and, fourth, a clear conception of the significance of the Minnesota Historical Society as one of the handful of great historical societies in the United States. The great contributions of Dr. Solon J. Buck, now archivist of the United States, and Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, now dean of the graduate school of the University of Minnesota, to this tradition have been maintained and enlarged by my immediate predecessors, and it is my sincere hope that the tradition may be still further expanded." After six months of educational experience in directing the activities of the Minnesota Historical Society, the new secretary-superintendent reaffirms his analysis of the qualities of the society and his confidence that a greater Minnesota Historical Society can be built. At no time in its history will the opportunity for building be greater than in the coming Centennial decade.

The society in 1947 acquired both a new job and a new super-

<sup>1</sup>This report was presented in the Historical Building, St. Paul, on January 12, 1948, before the business session of the ninety-ninth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society. *Ed.*

intendent. The new job was the official responsibility for the celebration in 1949 of the Minnesota Territorial Centennial. The new superintendent was appointed at midyear to succeed Major Arthur J. Larsen, who resigned to enter the United States Army after nineteen years of service in the society's newspaper department and as its superintendent. During the first six and a half months of 1947, the society's work was directed by Major Larsen. If in this report there seems to be undue emphasis upon the last five and a half months of the year, it should be charged to the difficulty of recapturing another's administration and not to any design to minimize the earlier months. Suffice it to say that the legislative appropriation to the society for the Centennial celebration was secured during the first half of the year, and the launching of the Centennial organization was effected in the second half of the year. During its entire course, however, the regular work of the society's staff proceeded uninterrupted and unimpaired. In the long run, it is this steady maintenance of its standards that constitutes the society's strength.

The work of the general office has inevitably been affected most directly by the change of administration. During the first six months of the year, stenographic and typing service for all departments of the society, except the library, the museum, and the newspaper division, was centralized in the general office. Aside from limited stenographic service to the editorial department and the research associate, the centralized system was discontinued for budgetary reasons under the new administration. The first part of the year was marked by many changes of personnel in the general office; now, however, an efficient and stable force is operating that office with admirable competence.

The volume of work performed by the general office personnel is indicated by the following list of functions: doing bookkeeping and accounting for all departments of the society, for the Centennial, and for the Minnesota State Archives Commission; handling the general correspondence of the society and of the superintendent; keeping of membership and subscription records; mimeographing; mailing and distributing publications; filing for all departments of

the society; providing stenographic service for the superintendent, the editorial department, and the research associate; and serving constantly as receptionists both for visitors to the office and for those who call the society by telephone.

Primary among the concerns of the general office is the increase of membership in the society. It is gratifying to be able to report that the total membership was augmented during the year by 104, bringing the total on December 31 to 2,083. This is the first time in the society's long history that the membership figure has passed the two-thousand mark. Most of the increase for 1947 is in annual memberships; most of it came during the fourth quarter of the year; and much of it may be credited to the devoted efforts of old members of the society. It is to be hoped that the membership figure will continue to rise at an accelerated rate.

The work of the library, including for the present biennium the manuscript division, makes up a large part of the annual operations of the society. From the full and informative reports of the various departments of the library, both quarterly and annual, one gains some appreciation of the mass of detailed work which goes into its activities. A few statistics tell the story. During the year, 1,761 books and 656 pamphlets, a total of 2,417, were added to the library. Deducting withdrawals, the net additions to the library in books and pamphlets were 1,596. This raised the number of books and pamphlets in the library from 191,955 to 193,551, of which 159,540 are accessioned and 34,011 are unaccessioned. The reference librarian reported the use of 18,395 books during the year by 2,850 readers, the largest number since 1942. There was a marked increase in the use of publications outside the fields of genealogy and local history, and a similar striking increase in use of the library by persons who were not genealogists. The library was used by 595 more people in 1947 than in 1946, the increase being explained by the larger number of students, both undergraduate and graduate, from the colleges of the metropolitan area. The statistics of the catalogue department are too detailed to include here, but the volume of work is indicated by the fact that 10,918 cards were added to the several library files during the year, all involving innumerable preliminary processes.

The manuscript division contains the society's most valuable treasures. To this nationally important collection of original historical material were added 117 groups of manuscripts, of which the following were outstanding: the records of the Root River State Bank; the papers of Charles Roos, a pioneer sheriff of Brown County; the papers of Franklin Ellsworth, attorney and representative in Congress from Minnesota; the office files of Cass Gilbert, famous architect and designer of the Minnesota State Capitol; the records of the St. Paul War History Committee; the diaries of James Peet, Methodist clergyman; two original letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson; the records of the Minnesota Child Labor Committee; and two letter books of Henry M. Rice. Additions were made to the collections of the personal papers of Bishop Henry B. Whipple, Ignatius Donnelly, James A. Andrews, Benjamin Drake, and Charles Thayer. The manuscript collections continued to be used by scholars from many institutions and regions of the United States.

The curator of the museum reported 24,404 registered visitors during 1947, including 15,673 students and members of school groups. This figure is the more impressive when consideration is given to the disruption of the museum during November and December, when the galleries were redecorated. The size of the attendance figure was, of course, favorably influenced by an increase in hours, achieved by Saturday and Sunday afternoon openings during the winter months.

The great event of 1947 in the museum was unquestionably the redecoration of the entire third floor, which was completed just after the turn of the year. The society's appreciation to the director of public property, Mr. Fred Denfeld, is hereby recorded, and with an exclamation point! The freshly painted walls of the museum rooms will make it possible to present a new series of Centennial exhibits, for which modern museum techniques will be employed.

A number of special exhibits were arranged during the year. Notable among the materials displayed were items illustrating the development of flour milling, loaned by the Pillsbury Institute of Flour Milling History; paintings and drawings by Eastman Johnson, loaned by the St. Louis County Historical Society; the Taliaferro

portraits; articles illustrating the history of the use of tobacco and featuring a reproduction of an early tobacconist's shop; the ecclesiastical robes and personal effects of Bishop Henry B. Whipple; early sheet music from the collection of Professor Philip D. Jordan; a numismatic collection arranged for exhibit and loaned by the Northwest Coin Club; and an exhibit at the Minnesota State Fair. Displays elsewhere in the state of articles from the society's museum were arranged at Itasca State Park, St. Croix State Park, and the Murray County Fair.

Seventy-five groups of museum objects were added in 1947. Special mention should be made of articles that once belonged to Bishop Whipple, several items of banking-house equipment used by the Root River State Bank, about ninety original cartoons by C. L. Bartholomew ("Bart") of Minneapolis, forty boxes of news film recording Minnesota events from 1905 to 1920, and an important collection of photographs of the Twin City area.

The most significant development in the newspaper department was the acquisition of a Model C-1 Recordak microfilm machine, with full equipment for the microfilming of newspapers and other materials. Its installation in a room on the basement level adjoining the newspaper stacks was being completed at the end of the year. To prepare for the use of the new equipment, the newspaper staff has been checking files of unbound newspapers, which will be the first to be microfilmed. The machine makes it possible to offer an extensive microfilming service to the newspapers of Minnesota. The ultimate disposition of bound volumes in the society's collections after they are microfilmed must be a matter for careful consideration. There can be no doubt, however, that the microfilming will result in a great saving of space.

The routine work of the newspaper department is always heavy, and it attests the importance and value of the society's extensive newspaper collection. The curator estimates that approximately 6,500 bound volumes and 7,877 loose issues of current papers were used by readers in 1947. The society received regularly 665 newspapers, and there were a number of special gifts, notably eighteen volumes of New Ulm newspapers and twenty-four volumes of the *St. Paul*

*Pioneer Press-Dispatch* for 1946. The curator is working on a bibliography of Minnesota newspapers, which should be completed and published soon, since it has been in preparation for twenty years.

No special publications were issued in 1947, but much work was done on future and regular publications of the society. Volume 28 of *Minnesota History*, issued during the past year, contains twenty articles and twenty-four book reviews. They were written by thirty-four authors, including several members of the society's staff, a Massachusetts bishop, a St. Paul housewife, a professor of history in the University of Washington, and other contributors chiefly from colleges, universities, and cultural institutions scattered from coast to coast. The subjects treated are as varied as the authors and their places of residence. Of four that are documentary in character, two are descriptive of the pre-territorial period of Minnesota history. A new feature of the quarterly is the section entitled "The Historical Scene," into which are consolidated several sections published earlier. Increasing attention to the territorial period in volume 28 anticipates the coming Centennial — an emphasis that will be continued during the next few years.

In addition to *Minnesota History*, the editorial department published for the society the monthly *News for Members* and issued the mimeographed *Gopher Historian* for distribution to members of Junior Historian chapters. Mrs. Mary W. Berthel gave much time to the preparation of articles on Minnesota for standard yearbooks and encyclopedias. The department has served as editorial consultant to the Forest Products and Centennial staffs, and its members frequently were consulted by visiting scholars. The volume on James M. Goodhue by Mrs. Berthel has been ready for the press for some time, and ways and means for its publication are now under consideration. Another future publication on which notable progress has been made is the volume tentatively entitled "A Pictorial History of Minnesota." Miss Bertha Heilbron is a member of the Centennial art committee, and she took a major part in making the arrangements for two concerts of Minnesota music presented in the Historical Building.

The numerous activities and achievements of the research associ-

ate, Dr. Grace Lee Nute, during 1947 defy brief summary. Not only has she carried forward simultaneously three major research projects—a history of Minnesota mining, a history of Lake Minnetonka, and a history of the Rainy Lake region, for which the Minnesota and Ontario Paper Company has made a donation of thirty-five hundred dollars—but she has produced several articles, booklets, and reviews, and a translation, and she has edited one long document for publication. She has given historical assistance to many organizations of the Twin City area, notably the Garden Club of America, the Colonial Dames of Minnesota, and the Ramsey County Red Cross chapter. Her writings have been published in *Minnesota History*, the *Conservation Volunteer*, the Hudson's Bay Company's quarterly *Beaver*, the *Catholic Digest*, the *Bulletin of Historical Research* of London, and *Inland Seas*. As chairman of the Alvord Memorial Commission of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, she is supervising its publication program. Much of her summer was spent in northern Minnesota gathering material for her histories of Minnesota mining and of the Rainy Lake region. In addition to all these and many other activities, Dr. Nute has found time to give thirteen major addresses during 1947. The society is fortunate indeed in the services of this learned and productive scholar.

The Minnesota State Archives Commission, created by the 1947 legislature, includes the society's superintendent as secretary. Other members are the Minnesota commissioner of administration as chairman, the attorney-general, the public examiner, and the state auditor. The headquarters of the commission has been established in the Historical Building, and the society provides accounting and other services. Much time has been given by the superintendent and the librarian to the meetings and activities of this new commission. Although the immediate objective of the commission, as directed by the legislature, is the disposal of noncurrent records now encumbering state offices, it is hoped that it will develop a well-organized archival program for Minnesota.

The Forest Products History Foundation, under the direction of Dr. Rodney C. Loehr of the history department in the University of Minnesota, has made notable progress in gathering material, assem-

bling bibliographies, conducting research in its field of interest, and bringing its work to the attention of the forest products industry nationally. The director forwarded all these activities on an extended summer trip, during which he visited sawmills, lumber camps, and plants connected with the industry, and established valuable contacts with its leaders in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California. Papers in the field of business history were read by Dr. Loehr before 1947 meetings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, the Farm Economics Association, and the Society of American Foresters. The foundation issued its first publication in 1947—an attractive brochure describing its founding, organization, work, and objectives. A second publication is in preparation. It is to be hoped that the forest products industry will permanently underwrite this important project.

The progress made in 1947 on a history of public health in Minnesota by the staff of the society's public health history project indicates that a publishable manuscript will be completed by the end of 1948. The project is directed by Professor Jordan of the University of Minnesota history department, who is now writing the historical study which the project will publish. During the year he has engaged in various other historical activities. Over the university radio station, KUOM, he broadcasts a popular weekly program entitled "Folklore Makes History"; he contributed articles and reviews to *Minnesota History* and several other historical and folklore journals; and he read a paper on public health in Minnesota before a meeting of the American Association of the History of Medicine in Cleveland last May. An advisory committee appointed for the public health project in 1947 is composed of Dean Theodore C. Blegen, chairman, Professor A. C. Krey, Dr. Gaylord Anderson, Dr. T. B. Magath, and Miss Helen Bunn.

The Junior Historian movement was still in an early stage of development in 1947, but a number of active chapters were in operation and a state-wide essay contest was held. The promotion of its work was in part taken over by the Centennial staff in the later months of the year, and the work of editing the *Gopher Historian* was assumed by Dean Horace Morse and Professor George McCune

of the University of Minnesota. It is expected that the Junior Historians will eventually become a full department of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Probably the most active committee of the society in 1947 was the school committee, under the chairmanship of Dean Morse. Not only has it strongly supported the society's general school program, but it has co-operated admirably with the Centennial staff.

The committee on historic buildings was revived in 1947 under the energetic chairmanship of Mrs. Richard M. Elliott of St. Paul, and at year's end this committee was preparing to launch an ambitious program for the adequate listing and marking of the significant historic buildings of Minnesota.

During the first months of 1947, a major concern of the superintendent and members of the executive council was the legislative appropriation to the society of funds sufficient for the commemoration of Minnesota's Territorial Centennial in 1949. As a result of their efforts the sum of \$150,000 was set aside for that purpose. Preliminary steps looking toward the society's conduct of the Centennial followed, but the change of administration delayed the appointment of a director until August. Then Dean Julius M. Nolte of the University of Minnesota extension division agreed to devote a third of his time to the task, and Mr. Richard R. Sackett was named deputy director. After the inevitable period of organization and recruitment of staff, the establishment of headquarters in the Historical Building, and the preliminary exploration of the problems facing the staff, the Centennial gathered headway. Committees on agriculture, art, schools, historic buildings, coin, stamp, and cachet were established or continued work begun earlier. Much time has been devoted to the organization of county Centennial committees and county historical societies to serve as responsible agencies for the Centennial commemoration in Minnesota's eighty-seven counties. An increasing amount of publicity has been gained for the Centennial, and the staff has been represented at numerous meetings and conferences. A Centennial planning manual designed for wide distribution, a historic calendar for 1949, a study outline for clubs and organizations, an address booklet, and a commemorative booklet were being prepared

at the end of the year. Through the courtesy of the Ford automobile dealers of Minnesota, the staff was provided with a station wagon, marked "1849 Minnesota Territorial Centennial 1949."

A number of notable public occasions were arranged by the society in 1947. Among them were the ninety-eighth annual meeting on March 3, when papers and addresses were presented by Mr. Quintus C. Wilson, Mr. L. A. Rossman, and Dr. Jim Dan Hill; the public presentation to the society on April 3 of pictures of Justice Pierce Butler and Attorney-general William D. Mitchell; a joint meeting of the society and the Minnesota Archaeological Society on June 3; a highly enjoyable summer tour of Lake Minnetonka on September 13, arranged by the state and the Hennepin County historical societies, and featuring an address by Dean Blegen on the "Saga of Saga Hill"; and two concerts of Minnesota music, which attracted large audiences to the Historical Building on October 15 and November 12. The programs for the latter, which were sponsored jointly by the society and the Schubert Club of St. Paul, consisted of musical performances by members of the club in appropriate costumes, and explanatory talks by Professor Jordan and Dean Blegen representing the society.

Members of the society's staff appeared on the programs of a large number of organizations that met in the Twin Cities and elsewhere during 1947. The principal theme of these talks was naturally the Territorial Centennial of 1949. In December the society was represented by the superintendent at the convention of the American Historical Association and affiliated organizations in Cleveland, where he participated in extended conferences with the directors of the state historical societies of the Middle West.

This report is necessarily incomplete and it indicates only the more important features of the work of the Minnesota Historical Society in 1947. Little mention has been made of the numerous changes in personnel, especially in the special departments and the Centennial staff, but the superintendent would be remiss indeed if he did not express the welcome of older members of the society's staff to the newer ones. The absorption of the newer members into the procedures and traditions of the society takes a little time, but

only rarely has the contagion of the staff's high standards failed to take hold. It is the hope of the superintendent that the staff may be provided with more adequate compensation, especially in these days of rapidly rising living costs.

In bringing this report to a close, the superintendent wishes to record certain recommendations which seem to him vital to the future of the society: First, a sustained effort must be made to increase the membership of the society. In a state of Minnesota's population, a membership of five thousand would seem to be a minimum expectation. Second, the society's influence throughout Minnesota must be greatly expanded, so that all the state's counties and communities will know of its work and will appreciate its value. Third, the society's budget must be enlarged to permit the necessary increase of staff to meet the challenge of the coming decade of Centennial observances. Fourth, the society's relationship with other state agencies, and especially with the University of Minnesota and the smaller colleges of Minnesota, must be strengthened. Fifth, a jealous watchfulness of the scholarly standards of the society must be steadfastly maintained. There is danger that preoccupation with promotional activities might impair the high standing of the society among the historical societies of the United States. This would be regrettable, and it is unnecessary. Sixth, there must be increased research and writing in the field of Minnesota history to feed the publication program of the society. To further this end, the relationship of the society with the departments of history of the state's colleges and universities must be close. Seventh, the society needs new and forward-looking friends to serve on its council and committees. A society is as strong as its supporters. And eighth, the superintendent must have strong, undivided support for an aggressive program of expansion and construction. Without such support, we can accomplish little. Working together, we can build a greater Minnesota Historical Society.



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