

# Pageant of the Past<sup>1</sup>

*Don Stubbs*

NARRATOR. THIS YEAR we celebrate a birthday. A birthday is a time for going over the past, for recalling what happened at a given time and place. When a man has a birthday, he will survey the years of his life and select the times when happiness came, and luck—or pain and misfortune. But this year we observe another birthday, the anniversary not of a man, but of an idea made from the lives and efforts of thousands of men and women—an idea called the State of Minnesota. And at a time for thinking back, how does a State remember? Where is the memory for sorting out the happenings of the past, and pausing at the times we want to treasure? Here is an answer for that.

BUCK. "History is to the community what memory is to the individual. A nation without knowledge of its history, like a man without a memory, would be helpless."

NARRATOR. The words of Dr. Solon J. Buck—one of the men who have given "community memory" to the state of Minnesota—in work with the Minnesota Historical Society.

WONDER. Why?

NARRATOR. And who has built up an unsurpassed historical collection at the home of the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul.

WONDER. Yes, but why?

NARRATOR. I'm sorry, sir, but you're interrupting.

WONDER. I know it.

NARRATOR. Just who are you, anyway?

<sup>1</sup> This dramatization of unusual and significant incidents in the record of the Minnesota Historical Society during the course of a century was written for its Centennial celebration on October 20, 1949. Produced in the manner of a studio broadcast by members of the University of Minnesota Radio Guild in collaboration with the staff of radio station KUOM, the "Pageant" was part of a program that followed the Centennial banquet in Coffman Memorial Union. The author based his text on material furnished by Mary W. Berthel of the society's staff. A list of those who arranged and directed the production appears below, p. 368. *Ed.*

WONDER. Just call me John R. Wonder. I'm a man who likes to know why.

NARRATOR. Why what?

WONDER. Why all this talk about a state having a memory? How did it all start?

NARRATOR (*at ease again*). Oh, I see. Well, Mr. Wonder, let's listen to the words of one of the first Minnesotans, or Minnesotians, as they sometimes called themselves in 1849.



NARRATOR. Monday, September 3, 1849, the day appointed by a proclamation for the meeting of the first session of the legislative assembly. His excellency, the first governor of Minnesota Territory, Alexander Ramsey, continues his first address. . . .

RAMSEY. "The preservation by a community, of materials for the composition of history, when a future time shall require it to be written, is a task not without its uses; and when early commenced, easily accomplished; and as newspapers are the day-books of history, as well as semi-official records in many cases, I deem it not improper to recommend to the Assembly, the propriety of authorizing and requiring the Territorial Secretary, or the Librarian, to subscribe for and preserve in a durable form, a copy of each and every newspaper that may be published in the Territory. Thus, much that is interesting in the fleeting registers of the day, and which, in years to come, will be esteemed rich mines for the historian, can be saved for satisfactory reference and future information."

NARRATOR. There you are, Mr. Wonder. In Governor Ramsey's first address to the first territorial legislature, he cited the need for preserving an account of the growth of the state. And there begins the first chapter in the historical society's story—the first reason for its existence.

WONDER. Why?

NARRATOR. Why? First of all, *For a Record*.

*For a Record*. On October 20, 1849, the first Minnesota territorial

legislature incorporated the Minnesota Historical Society, the oldest institution in the state. Named in the act of incorporation were many of the men who were at that time making Minnesota history, among them Henry H. Sibley, Henry M. Rice, Franklin Steele, and Martin McLeod. The society's first meeting was held on November 15, with Charles K. Smith, secretary of the territory, as its secretary also. Plans were made for the first annual meeting of the society. And from the *Minnesota Pioneer*, January 2, 1850, the day after the meeting, comes this account:

PIONEER. "At 11 o'clock A.M. our people assembled at the Methodist church, to attend the exercises of the Minnesota Historical Society; where an introductory lecture was delivered by the Rev. Mr. Neill, which was not merely instructive, but thrillingly eloquent; his subject, the early voyageurs of the North West. . . . Every listener was delighted, and the exercises were enlivened by the instrumental music of that excellent band from Fort Snelling."

NARRATOR. The Reverend Edward D. Neill was to have a larger part in the record of the society than he may have suspected at the time. For although much of the credit for the beginnings must go to C. K. Smith, his term as secretary ended rather suddenly in 1851—partly by request. His short history in Minnesota Territory was briefly summed up by James M. Goodhue, who remarked in the *Minnesota Pioneer* that:

PIONEER. "Secretary Smith had stolen *into* the Territory, and stolen *in* the Territory, and would in the end, steal *out* of the Territory."

*Sound. Knocking.*

RAMSEY (*off*). Come in.

*Sound. Door opens. Footsteps.*

NEILL. You sent for me, Governor Ramsey?

RAMSEY. Oh, yes. Won't you sit down, Mr. Neill. Sir, I've been following your work in the territory with a great deal of interest. First of all, as Presbyterian minister, and now latterly as our first superintendent of public instruction, you've done a fine job, Mr. Neill.

NEILL. Oh, anyone . . .

RAMSEY. And now I'd like to speak to you not in my role as governor, but as president of the historical society. You see, we're confronted with the problem of choosing a new secretary for the society, due to the—uh—resignation of Mr. Smith.

NEILL. Yes, of course.

RAMSEY. And in talking the matter over with Mr. Sibley, Mr. Rice, and others on the board—well, we all agree that you're the man for the job. If you'll have it.

NEILL. Why, I . . .

RAMSEY. Now as you know, the society is still very young—we haven't even a regular meeting place as yet—but the work *has* begun, and I'd like to see it carried on. You'll think it over then, Mr. Neill.

NEILL. Why, yes. Yes, of course. And thank you, sir.

NARRATOR. And under the leadership of Edward D. Neill, who has been called the "father of education" in Minnesota, the society carried on, and not only in its aim for a record. In 1850 it published the first book printed in the territory, the *Annals* of the society, with a copy of Neill's address before the first annual meeting. This was followed by an important contribution to Indian philology—a *Grammar and Dictionary of the Dakota Language*.



WONDER. That's fine! But—oh, excuse me.

NARRATOR. Well, Mr. Wonder, are you still here?

WONDER. Sure. I'm already worried about that society. Why, it didn't even have a place to meet!

NARRATOR. Oh, but that was in 1851. In 1855 a special room was set aside for it.

WONDER. Oh, that's fine! Where?

NARRATOR. In the basement of the Capitol. But the room wasn't very large, and the records and collections kept increasing. And there were enough citizens interested to buy two lots for a new building, just for the society. The lots were at Tenth and Wabasha,

and they cost \$1,531.00. There was even enough money left to lay a foundation!

*Sound. Wild cheering bursts forth.*

ORATOR (*seriously, as cheering dies down*). "And it is only fitting that on such an occasion citizens should assemble from all corners of the territory. At least fifteen steamers have arrived, bringing you, our friends, from all parts, for this cornerstone celebration. Our state is showing an interest in the society which will make June 24, 1856, a day to remember in Minnesota. We have enjoyed the music of the Fort Snelling Military Band, the ceremonies by our Masonic friends, and later a parade will lead us to a cotillion party and a concert by the Singing Hutchinsons, on one of the largest steamboats on the river." (*Sound. Applause.*) "But now, a message from our esteemed mayor, the honorable Mr. Becker."

BECKER (*deliberately*). "In all the apartments of natural history indeed, this society has before it a rich and exhaustless field of inquiry. But take another view: an unknown race has had dominion here. Think of those upon whose rest we trample. 'Are they here, the dead of other days? And did the dust of these fair solitudes once stir with life and burn with passion? Let the mighty mounds that overlook the rivers, or that rise in the dim forest, crowned with old oaks, answer.'"

NARRATOR. Yes, *For a Record*. Interest in the culture of the state was at a peak in 1856, but the foundation laid by members of the society was never built upon, for in 1857—the panic. Banks failed, real estate fell, the bottom dropped out.

WONDER. What about our friends in that basement room?

NARRATOR. They even lost that, in 1859. Lost the society's appropriation. Lost Mr. Neill when he was called to the Civil War as a chaplain. From a circular sent to the newspapers in 1862:

VOICE. "Sirs: No appropriation having been made for the support of the Minnesota Historical Society for the current year, it has been considered advisable to reduce expenses to the minimum in the way of postage, etc. I have therefore to request you to discontinue sending your paper to the Society by mail as at present. If

you can find it convenient however to reserve copies for us and send them annually or semi-annually by some sure hand, you will confer a favor upon us and there will be a greater likelihood of having unbroken files than under the present arrangement."



NARRATOR. *For a Record*. And the record continued, for the 1860's were history-making years. 1861:

PIONEER. Minnesota, the newest state, was first to volunteer support for the Union.

NARRATOR. 1862:

PIONEER. The battle of the "Monitor" and the "Merrimac" — armored gunboats.

NARRATOR. *For a Record*: a letter to the society.

MILLER (*light young voice*). "I enclose you a small piece of the rebel war balloon. It was captured a few days since on the James River, upon and with the rebel gunboat 'Teager,' by our gunboats. It is said to have been of silk dress patterns presented by the ladies of Richmond, and to have consisted of a dozen or more different patterns. Truly yours, STEPHEN MILLER, Headquarters First Minnesota Regiment, Near Harrison's Landing, Virginia, July 7, 1862."

NARRATOR. 1864: Lincoln re-elected.

PIONEER. The Minnesota Historical Society reorganized.

NARRATOR. Still engaged in the war, Minnesota had experienced history at home that was too dramatic to be ignored — the Sioux Massacre of 1862, the Mankato hangings. From the journal of Alexander Ramsey, as published by the historical society, under November 23, 1864, we read:

RAMSEY. "Called to see President and Secretary of War in the evening. President in fine spirits, talks of the result of the election, majority in several states. Said his in Minnesota in 1860 was 10,000 and now only 7,000. I jocularly remarked that if he had hung more Indians, we should have given him his old majority. He said, 'I could not afford to hang men for votes.'"



NARRATOR. A St. Paul reporter attended the meetings of the re-organized society—held, by the way, back in the old Capitol basement—a reporter by the name of J. Fletcher Williams, with a driving interest in the study of history. Williams' columns in the next few years reflected the spirit of growing Minnesota, recovering from two wars. Also in the columns was a vital interest in the history of Minnesota, an interest which led to Williams' election as secretary and librarian of the historical society in 1867. Since he was still a reporter, his conversations with people of all sorts were a background for his historical work. Later, in 1876, his history of St. Paul was published by the society—a book based at least in part on his own experience in living through the history. The society prospered.

WONDER. But you said the society lost its rooms.

NARRATOR. That was almost ten years back, Mr. Wonder. In 1868 it moved back into the Capitol. Then in 1869:

PIONEER. Under President William Watts Folwell, the first college classes opened at the University of Minnesota in St. Anthony.

NARRATOR. Footnote. In the same year, Minnesota saw the first organization of a sort new to the state. From the *Mower County Transcript* of Austin:

LADY. "The fair, festival, and concert given by the Ladies' Floral Club of this place on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week were a perfect success. The floral club was organized for the purpose of studying flowers and beautifying the city. The display of greenhouse plants, comprising a large variety of perennials too tender for the rigors of this northern climate, were exceedingly fine."

NARRATOR. Minnesota's first women's club. Women were making themselves heard—and read. More than a decade before, Minnesota's first ardent feminist had struck up the cry for equal rights, along with her pleas for abolition. And this St. Cloud newspaper editor, Jane Grey Swisshelm, is the fascinating central character in a book of her writings edited by Arthur J. Larsen, a superintendent of the historical society.

WONDER. You know something?

NARRATOR. Ah, Mr. Wonder, still with us! You were saying?

WONDER. I wonder—didn't you say that all this was *For a Record*?

NARRATOR. That's the way Governor Ramsey saw it, but in the act of incorporation, the purposes were these:

VOICE. "The collection and preservation of a Library, Mineralogical and Geological specimens, Indian curiosities and other matters and things connected with, and calculated to illustrate and perpetuate the history and settlement of said Territory."

NARRATOR. And while Williams was in charge, these collections flourished—specimens, curiosities, and other things—and with the growth of useful collections came a mushroom expansion in the number of other items. Imagine dusting around some of these strange exhibits:

WOMAN (*itemizes*). Body of a lynx killed near St. Paul. Scalp of Little Crow, "*tanned*, and thus in a measure imperishable." A fragment of the boiler of the "John Rumsey," that exploded November 4, 1864. Birds' nests partly made of newspaper. A curiously woven garment, found on a Peruvian mummy. Knot of a tree, shaped like a human face!



NARRATOR. *For a Collection*. And during this period came an enormous growth in genealogical works. These family records were to become part of what is now ranked as the second or third largest genealogical collection in the nation. One problem in 1881 was that of selection, especially in regard to the "curiosities." On the first of March, soon after 9:00 P.M., the problem of an overstocked museum was effectually solved:

*Sound. Terrific clanging of fire alarm bell.*

JACKSON (*excited yell*). Connors! That's box number nine!

CONNORS (*off*). No, it's fifteen! (*Louder*). Get those horses out, Duff, men! Hitch 'em to the steamer. Get down here—it's a big one!

JACKSON. It's fifteen, all right. Look at that sky—it looks like the whole hill is on fire.



CONNORS (*on*). No, not the whole hill, Jackson. Don't you see what it is? It's the Capitol!

NARRATOR. By midnight, only blackened walls remained. From the next day's *Pioneer*:

PIONEER. "A Dreadful Disaster. The Capitol Engulfed in a Sea of Angry Flames and Laid in Ruins."

NARRATOR. And in the basement rooms of the society?

PIONEER. Most of the books saved. Only one or two cases destroyed, *including many relics*. Mr. Williams, the librarian, was in no wise cast down. He says the society's motto is "Resurgam," and that it is well the loss is no more.

NARRATOR. *For a Collection*. The fire left no casualties among the assembled legislature, and few among the important records of the society, including newspapers dating back to the opening of the territory. For two years the society was in the St. Paul Market House—in the basement—and then it moved into the new and larger Capitol building, in 1883.

WONDER. New rooms?

NARRATOR. Oh, yes, Mr. Wonder.

WONDER. Uh—new basement?

NARRATOR. That is correct. And during the 1880's a rush of activity in Minnesota gave the society plenty of work to do, just to keep up with the times. 1882:

PIONEER. Ignatius Donnelly, leader of the Progressive party, is author of a new and startling novel—*The Lost Atlantis*.

NARRATOR. In 1885:

PIONEER. Minnesota has become one of the great wheat states of the nation.

NARRATOR. In 1887:

PIONEER. Dairying in Minnesota on the increase.

NARRATOR. And in 1890—the Twin Cities had no wish to be *identical* twins.

*Sound. Telegraph key continues.*

MAN. The latest census reports—Minneapolis, 182,967 souls. St. Paul, 142,581 inhabitants.

NARRATOR. But it wasn't so. In Minneapolis:

MINNEAPOLIS. Why, they stuck in ninety people living in an abandoned warehouse! St. Paul is padding those census returns like a mattress! Is there no honesty any more?

NARRATOR. And in St. Paul:

ST. PAUL (*aristocratic*). Do you know how they got that ridiculous population in (*sneer*) the Mill City? For just *one* example—they have five hundred persons listed as inhabiting the Union Depot! Is there no truth in them?

NARRATOR. Angry partisans demanded that the truth be ferreted out, and eventually it was.

MAN. Correction. Final census reports show that the census returns for the Twin Cities are as follows: For St. Paul, 133,156. For Minneapolis, 164,738. The war of the census is over.

NARRATOR. It is to be hoped that members of the historical society, operating on a basis of cold, hard, objectivity, showed no favoritism in this tournament.



NARRATOR. *For a Collection*. In 1893 J. Fletcher Williams resigned from the secretaryship of the society, after a period of remarkable service during which publications of the society were resumed, a fine library established on lines which still are followed today, and a genealogical collection begun which is now scarcely surpassed by that in the Library of Congress.

LADY. To the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul: I was born and raised in Minnesota, and moved to my present home in California twenty years ago. I have no relatives here, and recently my husband died, leaving me a rather large sum of money. I wish to make my will, but I have no way of knowing if any of my relatives are still alive out there. Can you inform me of any living descendants of my grandfather, Francis James Caldicott, who settled near New Ulm in 1855.

NARRATOR. At least a third of all the thousands of requests for information which reach the society each year are for information

of this sort. Family records are preserved which are available nowhere else in the world. History goes on. In 1898:

PIONEER. The battleship "Maine" sunk in Havana harbor. The United States at war!

NARRATOR. For many months American troops fought to free Cuba and the Philippines from the rule of Spain. Minnesotans were on hand at the triumphant return of Commodore Dewey from Manila, to celebrate the end of the war.

In 1900 there began a quieter war, with no open conflict, but plenty of subterranean turbulence. In the minutes of the Minnesota Historical Society, Monday, January 8, 1900:

SECRETARY UPHAM (*very dignified*). "Councilor Moss inquired whether the council considers women eligible to membership in the society, stating that he had received two applications for membership, by a gentleman and his wife of Minneapolis. (*Clears throat*). After some comment by councilors, Mr. Moss moved that this question be referred to a special committee, Councilors Clark and Clough, and invited the Honorable William P. Murray to act with them."

WONDER. Well, what happened?

NARRATOR. Oh, Mr. Wonder, are you interested in the history of the feminist movement?

WONDER. Sure. Those Bloomer girls had real courage.

NARRATOR. Well, it's not on record that Mrs. Amelia Bloomer's girls ever invaded the Capitol, but even though the secretary may not have known it at the time, a woman had been one of the early members of the society. Miss Harriet Bishop, the famous schoolmarm, joined in 1850. Anyway, a silent victory was won by the ladies, for in the minutes for Monday, September 9, 1901, we find that Councilor Clark, chairman of the membership committee, reported with approval the following nomination: Miss Hester McLean Pollock of St. Paul, nominated by Councilors Clark and Sanborn for annual membership. It was voted that the secretary cast the ballot for the election of the person thus nominated, which was accordingly done, and she was declared so elected.

WONDER. Well, that's fine. But what did those women think of the society? I mean the way everything was set up in the basement?

NARRATOR. Oh, I'd forgotten, Mr. Wonder. We're getting behind on those basements. Here's what was happening in 1905:

PIONEER. The Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra celebrates its second birthday, under its eminent conductor, Emil Oberhoffer.

NARRATOR. And also in 1905, there was another moving day for the historical society.

PIONEER. New state Capitol completed, at a cost of almost four and a half million dollars!

WONDER. Oh, no! Don't tell me! Let me guess.

NARRATOR. Yes, Mr. Wonder, the historical society took over rooms in Cass Gilbert's beautiful new marble Capitol—in the basement.



NARRATOR. *For a Collection.* The Sibley collection of reminiscences, diaries, and letters, covering the early years of Minnesota's growth. The Ramsey collection, containing a record of Minnesota's part in the growth of the nation. Hundreds of early paintings and photographs showing the young state while it was still largely wilderness. A document in Abraham Lincoln's hand, reluctantly ordering the execution of thirty-nine Indians for their part in the Sioux Outbreak. A complete file, except for one issue, of the earliest Minnesota newspaper, James M. Goodhue's *Pioneer*. The fascinating and prophetic writings of perhaps the most controversial figure who ever lived in Minnesota—Ignatius Donnelly—together with his voluminous correspondence with fabulous personalities all over the world.

*For a Record.* And *For a Collection.* But also for something else. In 1915:

PIONEER. The luxury liner "Lusitania" sunk by German submarine. 124 Americans lost.

NARRATOR. In a world at war, there is a search for meanings, an

effort to examine the past in planning the present. In 1914 Dr. Solon J. Buck had been appointed secretary of the historical society—the first professional historian to hold the position. Changes were made.

*Sound. Knocking.*

BUCK. Come in.

*Sound. Door opens. Footsteps.*

GIRL. I'm sorry to disturb you, Dr. Buck, but there's a gentleman from the press to see you.

BUCK. That's quite all right, send him in.

GIRL. (*off*). Will you step in, please? *Sound. Door closes.*

REPORTER. I'm Max Carver, Dr. Buck.

BUCK. What can I do for you, Mr. Carver?

CARVER. I thought I could get a story from you on the society. I hear you've made some changes. People are talking about it.

BUCK. I'm afraid there's no scoop here, but I'll explain what I'm trying to do. In the first place, under the law the object of the society is supposed to be the collection and preservation of the records of the people of Minnesota, *and* the dissemination of information about the history of Minnesota and its people. We have the collections, all right, but there are a lot of people who don't know, and don't care. We're custodians of records from offices in the state, county, and township. There are times when it makes a lot of difference on what day and in what place, John Jones was born, or went to school, or sold a bushel of oats to his neighbor. But people have to know that we have the records. Then there's the library. The law says the society shall keep its library open for the free use of the public, but people have to know how useful the library can be, where it is, how to use it. We have to bring the society to the people, make it a living, useful part of their lives.

NARRATOR. To resort to the vernacular, Dr. Buck stirred up the dust, and it was never allowed to settle down. In 1915 a quarterly magazine, *Minnesota History*, was launched. The society went out to the schools; it reminded a busy public of the importance of the past in the present. Instead of a museum of various and unrelated curiosities from the past, an actual reconstruction was made of living conditions in the early years of the state. Minnesota was no longer

a fledgling state, writing its history as of the moment. The time had come for an arrangement of the record—*For Interpretation*.

WONDER. Pardon me.

NARRATOR. Oh, Mr. Wonder. What are you wondering about just now?

WONDER. I'm still worried about those poor people working in the basement. Did they ever get upstairs?

NARRATOR. We're just getting to that. In 1918:

PIONEER. November eleventh declared Armistice Day. The war is over!

NARRATOR. And in 1918, the Minnesota Historical Society moved into its present quarters, a building just east of the Capitol. Is that what you were waiting for, Mr. Wonder?

WONDER. That's it. Are they still there?

NARRATOR. Still there, Mr. Wonder.



NARRATOR. *For Interpretation*. A state reaching maturity considers its people and their works. Within a hundred years Minnesota saw one civilization pass out of existence and another take its place. The second was a complex, dynamic culture, made up of many nationalities and customs and religious groups. Even in so young a state, it is a vast problem to fit men and events into a pattern with meaning. That task fell to a man who had the preparation of a lifetime of study, who went about his work carefully and exactingly and lovingly. His accomplishment is unsurpassed.

*Sound. Slight wind or traffic noises to indicate scene outside Historical Building. Footsteps.*

DANNY. Mister (*footsteps stop*).

FOLWELL. Why, I—I didn't see you there, little boy

DANNY. I'm not a little boy.

FOLWELL. Oh. Why, of course not. I'm—ah—getting old. I don't see so well.

DANNY. I see you every day when I'm out playing.

FOLWELL. You do?

DANNY. Sure. I live across the street.

FOLWELL. You do?

DANNY. M-hmm. What's that you always carry?

FOLWELL. Hmmm? Oh, you mean my brief case. Oh, just some papers.

DANNY. Do you live up in that big grey building?

FOLWELL. Oh, no. Oh, my no. I just do some work there.

DANNY. Why?

FOLWELL. Why? Well—ah—I'm writing a book.

DANNY. You are? Why?

FOLWELL. Well, let's see. Ah—can you remember yesterday?

DANNY. Yesterday? I think so.

FOLWELL. Can you remember what happened?

DANNY. Well, in the morning I was a good boy, and mama gave me a piece of candy. And then in the afternoon I was a bad boy and mama put me to bed. And—uh—that's all, I guess.

FOLWELL. Then, if you remember that, what are you going to be today? A good boy, or a bad boy?

DANNY (*thinks*). I don't know. I think I'll try to be a good boy. That was good candy. Why?

FOLWELL. Well, you asked me why I'm writing my book. In a way I'm—well—I'm trying to help everyone to be as wise as you are. If we can all look back—take a good look at what happened yesterday—why, it might help us today. It might even help us to plan for tomorrow. That's why I'm writing this book. By the way, little boy, what's your name?

DANNY. Danny. What's yours?

FOLWELL. Why, it's Folwell—William Folwell.

DANNY. Oh. Well, goodbye, Mr. Folwell.

FOLWELL. Goodbye, Danny.

NARRATOR. *For Interpretation.* William Watts Folwell, first president of the University of Minnesota. Minnesota's "Pioneer of Culture." As a teacher he brought inspiration to hundreds of the leaders of today, and as an administrator he brought to the state other torchbearers of civilization. After his retirement he devoted the remaining years of his life to research in the history of his adopted state—Minnesota. His masterful four-volume *History of Minnesota*

is generally recognized as one of the outstanding histories of an American state. After more than two decades of almost continuous research and writing, his work on the final volume ended only a few months before his death in 1929. Rejecting a liberal offer from a commercial publisher, Dr. Folwell gave the results of his work to the people, through the Minnesota Historical Society.



NARRATOR. 1922:

PIONEER. President Harding says "Back to Normalcy."

NARRATOR. And an era opened that was later to be called "The Jazz Age." A book was published that raised blood pressures in a certain Minnesota town; it was a little too true to life. The author called the town Gopher Prairie, but everyone knew better. And Sinclair Lewis was just one writer who found invaluable information in the records and files of the Minnesota Historical Society. Later Helen Clapesattle was to use similar sources in the preparation of one of America's most widely read biographies—*The Doctors Mayo*. Members of the staff wrote for publication by the society:

MAN. Stories of Minnesota farmers and frontiersmen.

WOMAN. *The Voyageur's Highway*, the history of Minnesota's lake country on the northern border, by Grace Lee Nute. Now in its fifth edition.

MAN. *Minnesota Farmers' Diaries*, edited by Rodney C. Loehr.

WOMAN. *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier in 1851: The Diary and Sketches of Frank Blackwell Mayer*, edited by Bertha L. Heilbron.

MAN. *The Earth Brought Forth: A History of Minnesota Agriculture to 1885*, by Merrill E. Jarchow.

WOMAN. The story of a most unusual St. Cloud woman, *Crusader and Feminist: Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm, 1858-1865*.

MAN. Edited by Arthur J. Larsen.

WOMAN. *Horns of Thunder: The Life and Times of James M. Goodhue*, by Mary Wheelhouse Berthel.

MAN. Two pioneer works in the handling and care of manuscripts:



WOMAN. *Rules for Copying Manuscripts and The Care and Cataloguing of Manuscripts*, by Grace Lee Nute.

MAN. Now used in libraries all over the country.

NARRATOR. *For Interpretation*. 1922 was an important year to the society. It marked the first affiliation of the state historical society with local organizations in the counties. Now each of Minnesota's eighty-seven counties has a historical society of its own, working in close conjunction with the larger group.



NORWEGIAN. "And then, some day, in the far West, when you see the sun rising over the water, then will you remember Norway, her mountains and valleys, and this last farewell of a friend. . . ."

NARRATOR. With songs recalling the Old Country, and at the same time welcoming their new homes, came thousands of hardy settlers—the Norwegians. They brought with them, beside their colorful folk music, a vigorous urge to grow. Their farms were soon the pride of the state. They came to be known in many fields—lumbering, business, the arts. Another culture absorbed into the growing state. Absorbed, but not lost. Here was another task *For Interpretation*.

To preserve the flavor of the old ballads and early folkways, and to show their meaning in America—these were some of the interests of Theodore C. Blegen. The song just quoted in translated form is from his collection of *Norwegian Emigrant Songs and Ballads*, edited with the help of Martin B. Ruud. Dean Blegen is also responsible for such publications as these:

MAN. A study of *Norwegian Migration to America*.

WOMAN. *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg*.

MAN. *The Unfinished Autobiography of Henry Hastings Sibley*.

WOMAN. *Building Minnesota*, a book which makes state history interesting for students in junior high schools.

NARRATOR. From the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*:

PIONEER. Dr. Blegen's "outstanding studies and publications on Norwegian immigration have not only brought him personal hon-

ors, but have fired a wide interest in the contributions of the Old World to the civilization of this state."

NARRATOR. Dr. Blegen served as assistant superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society from 1922 to 1931, and as superintendent during the next eight years. The society advanced in several fields.

MAN. Publications made available the results of recent research in Minnesota history.

WOMAN. The manuscript collection increased by more than a third.

MAN. The library expanded in size and readership.

WOMAN. Radio talks on Minnesota history reached a wide audience.

NARRATOR. From the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*:

PIONEER. "Under Dr. Blegen's able editorship," the society's quarterly magazine, *Minnesota History*, has become "widely known as one of the best periodicals of its kind in the country."

NARRATOR. In 1939 Dr. Blegen was awarded a fellowship by the Norwegian-American Historical Association, to work in the field of American immigration history. He later became professor of American history at the University of Minnesota and then dean of its graduate school.



WONDER. I wonder!

NARRATOR. Why, Mr. Wonder, are you at it again?

WONDER. I'm John R. Wonder. I'm a man who wants to know why.

NARRATOR. I know. Now what?

WONDER. I wonder whether people are still interested in—well, those old things. Horse and buggy days and all that. (*Wisely.*) This is the atomic age, you know. Jet planes and so forth.

NARRATOR. Well, history has speeded up, too—at least the ways of keeping it. For instance, take microfilm. It's easy now to get copies of manuscripts from all over the world, and keep copies in the form of tiny, rolled-up films. And it isn't a matter now of Min-

nesota citizens only being interested in Minnesota history. Here's what I mean. From France:

FRENCHMAN. I would like to ask your help in preparing a history of the voyageurs. Much information is in your collection which can be found nowhere else.

NARRATOR. From California:

WOMAN. I collect stamps which have pictures of wagons. I noticed the Minnesota Territorial Centennial stamp with a Red River ox cart. Was this cart really used in Minnesota? When?

NARRATOR. It was indeed, and the society has one of the two or three Red River carts known to exist anywhere. From a New York author:

AUTHOR. A scene in my novel takes place in the old Minnesota Capitol. I would like to find out if it had a gallery.

NARRATOR. It did. From a Minnesota school board:

MAN. I believe you have films of the records of school districts in our county. I would like to know when our school was founded.

NARRATOR. Counties may turn over records which are six years old. Sometimes they are recorded on film. From a student:

STUDENT. I am preparing to take my master's degree at Harvard University. Will it be possible to spend several months working with your manuscripts in the preparation of a thesis on Ignatius Donnelly?

NARRATOR. It was, and the student is there now. From a businessman:

BUSINESSMAN. Our firm is interested in learning the dates of Centennial celebrations in Minnesota towns. We can make special Centennial products available to them.

NARRATOR. From a speaker: I am addressing a group in Zumbrota, and would like to know some facts about the place.

From all over the world to the society come requests for information. By mail, in person, and through the telephone come calls for facts that often can be found nowhere else. The society's information service was established first by Secretary Buck in 1914.

NARRATOR. *For a Record.*

*For a Collection.*

*For Interpretation.*

*For Education.* There is one more reason, Mr. Wonder, for the society, for the "community memory." In a world that hopes for peace, a state must strive with the nation for a common bond between the countries of the world. Witness the work of the United Nations educational, social, and cultural organization to bring about understanding, to overcome the barriers of language, space, and differences in culture. Now more than ever the Minnesota Historical Society is more than a community memory. It has increased its scope *For the Future!*

Well, Mr. Wonder, does that answer your question?

WONDER. Yes, I'm John R. Wonder, a man who likes to know why. And now I'd like to know how.

NARRATOR. Mr. Wonder, how what?

WONDER. How can I join up?

NARRATOR. Mr. Wonder, you can help with the work of the society by taking an annual membership, a year's sustaining membership, or a life membership. You'll become one of the people who are helping in every way possible to continue the community memory. In the words of George E. Vincent:

VINCENT. "A state or nation . . . has a tradition, a history which may be likened to the memory of an individual. A group of people is bound together by consciousness of a common past experience. Without memory there can be no personality; without history no real nation or state. Minnesota is to us only a name unless it conjures up a procession of red men, voyageurs, missionaries, pioneers of settlement, organizers of institutions, immigrants, leaders of men, gradually creating a commonwealth. We cannot realize ourselves as a group unless, in imagination, we can picture the onward sweep of events—the pageant of the past which has made us what we are."



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