THE 1923 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The seventy-fourth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society on January 15 followed the general plan of last year's meeting, with morning, afternoon, and evening sessions at which papers were read and discussions held on various subjects in the field of Minnesota history. The unusually large attendance at these sessions is an indorsement of the plan initiated in 1921 and is one of numerous recent indications of the growing popular interest in the history of the state.

A notable attendance from outside the Twin Cities contributed in no small measure to the success of the meeting. Among the fifty persons who were present at the opening session, which was devoted to the third annual conference on local history work in Minnesota, were representatives of local history interests in Blue Earth, Chisago, Hennepin, Kandiyohi, Ramsey, Red Lake, Redwood, Renville, Rice, St. Louis, and Yellow Medicine counties. This conference, which was held at 10:00 A.M. in the auditorium of the society's building, opened with a discussion on the subject of "State Parks and Memorials in Relation to Local History Interest," led by Mr. Ray P. Chase, state auditor. Mr. Chase first pointed out that most of the state parks and memorial sites in Minnesota are at present under the supervision of a fiscal officer, the state auditor, who is ex officio land commissioner. Although the state already has expended approximately eight hundred thousand dollars for the purchase and maintenance of its parks and historic places, no real system has been worked out and adopted for their administration. The setting aside of natural beauty spots for the pleasure and recreation of the people and the adequate marking and preservation of historic sites are matters which, if they are worth doing at all, merit careful planning and expert, centralized administration. After calling
attention to the methods employed in caring for state parks in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, and Pennsylvania, and nearer home in Wisconsin and Iowa, Mr. Chase urged the desirability of locating state parks in accordance with some definite plan, of standardizing their equipment, and of administering them uniformly. He asserted that a program is needed which will anticipate the future growth of Minnesota. In order that such a program may be prepared, it is necessary "to place the administration of all state-owned parks, camp sites, playgrounds, monuments and monument sites, and state-owned points of historical interest or value under the immediate supervision of an expert commission or commissioner."

Mr. Chase exhibited a large map of Minnesota on which were shown the locations of the present state parks and monuments and also of certain proposed state parks. He said that the important factors to be considered in the selection of sites are natural beauty, historic interest, and accessibility. In conclusion he called special attention to certain sections of the state which in his opinion deserve to be represented in a comprehensive state park system. Members of the Minnesota Historical Society will be interested in learning that Mr. Chase earnestly recommended the establishment of a state park which will include the historic Grand Portage region. Numerous other available sites were suggested, in the vicinity of Pipestone, Lake Shetek, St. Cloud, Leech Lake, Twin Lakes, Albert Lea, Fairmont, Okabena, Blue Mound, Mille Lacs, Lake Benton, Camden Hills, Ortonville, Waconia, Lake Bemidji, and Fergus Falls.

Mr. William E. Stoopes of the Minnesota Highway Department, who followed Mr. Chase in the discussion, emphasized the importance of parks in relation to the vast number of tourists who visit the state during the summer months. The absence of parks and camp sites along the main trunk highways

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1 In Mr. Chase's valuable Statement to the Nineteen Hundred Twenty-three Legislature on state parks and memorials, the points which he made in the discussion summarized above are carefully elaborated. See post, p. 137.
was suggested as one of the principal defects in the present system. After explaining some of the practical problems connected with the equipment of state parks, with special reference to the tourist traffic, the speaker showed how the highway department would be able effectively to coöperate with the officials placed in charge of the park system.

To abandon the state parks or to fail adequately to meet the demands of the present situation would be a backward step which all would regret for "years and years to come," in the opinion of Mr. Charles H. Ramsdell of Minneapolis, who continued the discussion. He emphatically indorsed the position taken by the state auditor and stressed the need of saving for the state its important historic sites. He expressed the belief that if the people of the state could be thoroughly interested in the project for an improved state park system, they would not hesitate to give it their hearty support, and thus Minnesota would be able to develop a plan of administration comparable with the plans followed in Wisconsin and in the eastern states.

Mr. Carlos Avery, state game and fish commissioner, spoke next, telling of the administration of Sibley State Park, which is under his supervision, and advocating a "well-defined, intelligent policy for the control of state parks." Mr. Avery urged the segregation of certain areas before the inflow of settlement, especially in the virgin region of northern Minnesota. To undertake such work before private interests place these lands beyond the reach of the public is a proper function for a state park commission.

At the close of this informing and suggestive discussion, the following resolution, moved by Mr. Frank Hopkins of Fairfax and seconded by Mr. Hiram M. Hitchcock of Redwood Falls, was unanimously adopted:

RESOLVED, That the state of Minnesota ought to establish, and more completely develop and superintend, a system of state parks, monument sites, and tourist camping grounds;

RESOLVED, That this should be done by means of a commissioner or commission of one or more existing state officials or
otherwise, and that a careful survey should be made in order to reveal the facts essential to the formation of an effective policy in relation to state parks and memorials; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to the respective committees on state parks in the Senate and the House of the state legislature now in session.

The next discussion, on "The Organization of Local History Activities and Their Relation to the State Society," was led by Mr. William E. Culkin, president of the recently organized St. Louis County Historical Society. Mr. Culkin strongly advocated the organization of local historical societies in all the counties of Minnesota. He declared that historical interest is deeply rooted in civilized people, and that in fact he had "never met a man or woman worth while who does not love historical subjects." The organizers of local history activities are, therefore, certain to secure a considerable measure of support from the people if they proceed properly. The speaker asserted that similar methods of organization are not necessary or even desirable in all the counties. In his opinion, however, every local society ought to have intimate relations with the state society. He suggested that the latter organization might appoint a "corresponding secretary in each county," who would act as a "sort of historical registrar" for the community. The important thing is that the Minnesota Historical Society should cooperate with local history leaders in effecting a definite organization. Mr. Culkin then described in some detail the organization of the St. Louis County Historical Society, the main features of which were mentioned in the BULLETIN for February. In concluding his remarks, the speaker expressed the hope that at some future time "local historical societies from all parts of the North Star State" would meet in joint conference at the building of the state society.

Mr. Victor E. Lawson of Willmar then described briefly the work of the Kandiyohi County Old Settlers' Association, which was established in 1894. This society has a very large
membership of men and women who represent many different religious and political groups but are united by the common bond of historical interest. Kandiyohi County was the scene of many important events connected with the Sioux Outbreak, and "a vast quantity of Indian stories have been told and re-told" at the meetings of the local society. Eventually a resolution was passed to put them into permanent form, a task which was entrusted to Mr. Lawson. Another interesting type of local history work was suggested by the speaker's concluding remark: "At every annual meeting we mark some historic site in Kandiyohi County."

The superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, who presided at the conference, called attention to the attempt which is being made to publish in each issue of the quarterly magazine of the state society accounts of local history activities throughout the state. The BULLETIN serves thus as a clearing house for ideas in this field, but its usefulness can be increased greatly if those who are in touch with the work will convey to the society information concerning local history activities.

At the close of the discussion, the following resolution, also moved by Mr. Hopkins, was unanimously adopted:

RESOLVED, That the various old settlers' and pioneer organizations of Minnesota be urged to establish "historical departments," with officials in charge, with a view to the collection and preservation of local historical data;

RESOLVED, That local organizations be urged to communicate information to the Minnesota Historical Society in regard to historical documents and data of state interest which merit permanent preservation; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the organization of county historical societies in Minnesota be recommended wherever such organization appears to be practicable.

At 12:30 P. M. approximately ninety members and friends of the society attended a luncheon at the St. Paul Athletic Club "to celebrate the enrollment of one thousand active mem-
bers."

After the luncheon was served the superintendent spoke briefly about the membership campaign. The achievement of a membership which is more than double that of two years ago is unmistakable proof that the people of the state are "reaching the point where they have a greater interest in the past of their community than they ever had before." The population of the state is so large, however, that one is justified in expecting a very considerable increase above the present number of members. The historical society, which was incorporated in October, 1849, by the first territorial legislature, will celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary in 1924, and that occasion "ought to be marked in some appropriate way." Mr. Buck proposed as a suitable slogan for the coming year, "two thousand members by the seventy-fifth anniversary," and announced that the first payment of dues by new members would cover the balance of the present and all of the next fiscal year. He declared that the Minnesota Historical Society, in cultivating the field of state history, is doing a work which is of direct interest to all citizens, to people in all walks of life, and that the society's membership by no means should be limited to those whose memories run back to the pioneer period.

The superintendent then introduced Mr. Elmer E. Adams of Fergus Falls, who acted as toastmaster for the program of informal talks which followed. Mr. Adams called attention to a recent newspaper editorial on "The Historical Society" in which the following vigorous indorsement appeared: "The society has just completed a successful campaign to increase its membership from 556, where it stood in October, 1921, to 1,000. This goal has been reached with so little difficulty that the society has decided not to stop there, but to conduct a new campaign to double the present membership. This project of the society deserves all the support which can be mustered to it in the state. The effort of the society to extend its influence should not be relaxed until it has a substantial membership in every county." The editorial went on to urge the enrollment of "at least 10,000" members in order that full justice may
be done "the state by the organization," and "the organization by the state."  

Mr. H. M. Hitchcock was then called upon to describe the campaign for membership which is being conducted in the Minnesota Valley. He spoke of the approaching centenary of the exploring expedition which visited the valley in 1823 under the leadership of Major Stephen H. Long. An anniversary tour of the Sioux Historic Trail and the holding of the next summer meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society in Redwood Falls would be especially appropriate, he said, in view of this centenary. The publications of the historical society, and particularly the forthcoming second volume of Dr. Folwell's *History of Minnesota* — with its promised account of the Sioux Outbreak — have great interest for the people who live in the historic Minnesota Valley region and are powerful inducements to membership in the society. Active coöperation has been secured from editors, who are helping to arouse historical interest by publishing timely historical articles in the columns of their newspapers.

The assistant superintendent, Mr. Theodore C. Blegen, called attention to the traveling exhibit which the society has prepared and which has since been sent to Redwood Falls. The object of this exhibit is to represent as clearly as possible the main activities of the society. With reference to the proposed campaign, the speaker said that the attainment of a large membership is a distinctly secondary aim. The primary object of the society is to arouse historical interest throughout the state and thus to secure a better understanding among the people of the functions of the historical society and, consequently, more general support and coöperation. Where interest and activity are thus stimulated, "historical-mindedness" develops, a genuine desideratum in all communities.

The toastmaster then introduced Dean Guy Stanton Ford of the University of Minnesota, who emphasized the challenge

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2 *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 7, 1923. The society has had this editorial reprinted and it is now available for distribution as a small leaflet.
in the date of the society's organization. If the young and vigorous men who came to Minnesota to lay the foundations of the commonwealth were ready to turn aside from their pressing tasks in 1849 in order to organize an historical society, said Mr. Ford, it is only fitting that their heirs and beneficiaries today should take up the challenge and give hearty support to the state in its efforts to preserve its records and to foster the development of the society as a great institution of public service.

Mr. Clifford L. Hilton, attorney-general of the state, expressed his appreciation of the vast collection of records which the society possesses and pointed out that its value to the people of Minnesota will tend constantly to increase. He asserted that the society's membership would rapidly increase if the present members would undertake to make others more familiar with the institution and its work.

Representative Theodore Christianson of Dawson declared that there is great intrinsic interest in the early history of the state. The pioneer period was one in which character and individuality, under the stress of the frontier environment, were strongly marked. The spirit of the frontiersman and his times, somewhat elusive in formal documents, may be caught in some of the stories which have come down from the early days. Mr. Christianson then told in happy vein a typical humorous pioneer story, and suggested that a real historical service might be rendered through the collection and publication of such materials for an understanding of Minnesota's past.

Other speakers upon whom the toastmaster called for brief responses and who contributed to the pleasure and success of the meeting were Mr. Samuel Lord, chairman of the Minnesota Tax Commission; Mr. Francis A. Duxbury, chairman of the Industrial Commission of Minnesota; and Mr. Benjamin F. Beardsley, who has been conspicuously active in the society's membership campaign.

The afternoon session, which convened in the Historical Building at 3:00 p.m. and which was attended by about 140
persons, was devoted to the reading of three historical papers. The first of these was Mr. Adams' interesting study in Minnesota political history which is published in the present number of the Bulletin.

The second paper, on "James Dickson, A Filibuster in Minnesota in 1836," was read by Miss Grace Lee Nute, curator of manuscripts of the Minnesota Historical Society. When a filibuster is mentioned in connection with American history one's thoughts instinctively turn southward, but original records which have been examined by Miss Nute prove that in 1836 a filibustering expedition began along the northern boundary of the United States and penetrated the northern part of the present area of Minnesota. Of the leader of this expedition, James Dickson, little is known, according to Miss Nute. He may have been Scotch, or English, or possibly the half-breed son of the famous Robert Dickson. That he had lived in Mexico for some time and had fought for the Texan cause is certain. In the winter of 1835-36 he appeared in Washington and, calling himself "General Dickson of the Indian Liberating Army" and "Montezuma II," endeavored to raise an army to help the Texans.

This venture proved unsuccessful, and Dickson next established relations with some Canadian half-breeds of Montreal whom he met at Buffalo in the summer of 1836. Here he chartered a small schooner and with sixty followers sailed for Sault Ste. Marie and Lake Superior. Dickson declared that his purpose was to recruit a hundred or two hundred half-breeds at the Red River colony and then to lead them to Santa Fé by way of the Missouri and its tributaries. After plundering this town he would fall back on California, wrest that province from its Mexican owners, and set up an Indian kingdom with himself as its monarch. To this state he expected all the prairie and mountain Indians to flock and also the tribes about to be removed by the United States government. No whites would be permitted in the proposed realm save a few officeholders. Such was Dickson's own explanation of his plans.
At Detroit the members of the party were arrested on a charge of piracy, but a retired army officer who was acquainted with Dickson interceded in their behalf and secured their release. Since they were unable to get their schooner into Lake Superior, the adventurers continued their trip in an old batteau, skirting the southern shore of the lake to Fond du Lac. Here they were given canoes and a guide by the officers of the American Fur Company's post, and thus equipped they made their way to Sandy Lake by the St. Louis portage route. Thence their journey took them up the Mississippi to Lake Winnebagoshish and on to Red Lake. By this time streams and lakes were frozen and the remainder of the trip was made on foot, with dog teams hauling the baggage.

The party's luck changed after the departure from Red Lake. First the guides deserted; then part of the company turned back; soon a snowstorm obliterated the wagon trail which they were following; an Indian led them away from the route which they should have taken; and finally the weather became exceedingly cold and the men froze faces, hands, and feet. They pressed on, however, and after three months of hardship reached Pembina, one of the Red River settlements. Miss Nute said that correspondence which is now preserved in archives in England indicates that the officials of the Hudson's Bay Company were greatly worried about the Dickson expedition, fearing that the filibusters would plunder the settlements. These officials did all in their power to thwart Dickson's plans, and he failed to secure his half-breed recruits. Whether he actually planned to oust the company from the region is not known, but that he entertained such a scheme is not unlikely, in Miss Nute's opinion.

Two of Dickson's officers and some of the privates were induced to enter the service of the fur company. Four of his men, including Martin McLeod and a guide, Pierre Bottineau, started for what is now St. Paul, intending to go on to St. Louis and there find employment. A blizzard overtook this party on the prairie some seventy miles from Lake Traverse.
and only McLeod and the guide survived. Two members of the Dickson expedition, Martin McLeod and Alexander R. McLeod, Jr., became well-known figures in Minnesota history. Dickson disappeared from the scene as suddenly as he came. His last letter stated that he was on his way to Texas. In an earlier letter, however, he wrote that he expected to go to the Pacific coast. Perhaps he perished on his way to one of these remote regions; certainly he lapsed into the obscurity from which he had originally emerged. Thus came to an end this curious and hitherto unknown chapter in Minnesota and western history. In preparing her paper Miss Nute used the diary of Martin McLeod and other interesting documents in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. These include letters written by Dickson, McLeod's commission as an officer in the "Army of the Liberator," the articles of war by which the company was to be guided, a list of the men who signed these articles, and a large placard in Spanish announcing to the Mexican Indians that Montezuma II was on his way to release them from slavery.

Mr. Arthur T. Adams of Minneapolis then read a paper on "The Location of Radisson's 'Fort,' 1660," in which he contended that the spot where Radisson and Groseilliers in 1660 erected their "fort," and participated in a grand Indian celebration of the "feast of death," was in Kanabec County, Minnesota, on Spring Brook Hill, two miles south of Mora. That the two French explorers did penetrate into the interior of Minnesota in 1660 and did erect a "fort" and take part in an Indian council is not questioned by historians of this period, according to Mr. Adams. He therefore based his argument

Some of the documents used by Miss Nute in the preparation of her paper were on exhibit in the manuscript room during the meeting. The paper was read at a meeting of the St. Louis County Historical Society at Duluth on March 5 and also at the annual meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association on March 29. An illustrated feature story based upon the article appears in the Minneapolis Journal for April 1 and 8 under the title "When Montezuma II Plotted a World Empire in Minnesota." The original article will be published in full in the Mississippi Valley Historical Review.
on the language which Radisson himself used to describe the "fort" in his own account of the famous "western voyage" of 1659-60. An analysis of this description shows that six qualities, five of which are geographical, are ascribed to the region of the "fort." In brief, it was an Indian rendezvous located on a hill near a stream which flowed out of a lake and into a meadow, the hill in question being situated between the lake and the meadow.

In his investigation Mr. Adams took as his starting point Dr. Warren Upham's identification of the site as in the general vicinity of Knife Lake. He then blocked out an area comprising six contiguous counties in which he established the sites of all known Indian villages, camp grounds, and meeting places. Thereupon he addressed himself to the problem of eliminating from consideration all sites which did not meet the five-fold geographical qualifications of Radisson's description. Only one place stood the test which Mr. Adams applied and this was Spring Brook Hill near Mora. Charts and maps were presented by the speaker to illustrate the specific steps in the process of ratiocinative reasoning which led to this conclusion.

On this Minnesota hill, declared Mr. Adams, probably occurred that Indian council of 1660, the record of which is preserved in the quaint words of Radisson. No less than five hundred Indians of "eighten severall nations" foregathered, according to the seventeenth century account, and in the space of "two dayes" completed the building of a large "fort," which "might be seen afar off." The word "fort," Mr. Adams pointed out, probably was used by Radisson, not to signify a military enclosure, but rather a "gathering together of boughs or brush, and perhaps a crude form of stockade," as a protection against the elements.4

4 An article based on Mr. Adams' paper is published in the Minneapolis Journal for January 14. Some of the maps prepared by the author in connection with his investigation and a picture of the supposed site appear with the article.
At the end of this program pictures of the Grand Portage region were exhibited on the screen by Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, Jr., curator of the society’s museum, after which he explained the special Grand Portage exhibit in the Indian room of the museum. The members and friends of the society were then conducted about the museum by guides.

The evening session, which included the formal business session of the society, was held at 8:00 p.m. in the west hall, the auditorium being too small to accommodate the audience of approximately 250. The minutes of the last annual meeting, on January 9, 1922, were read and approved, and the annual report of the treasurer was referred to the council. The superintendent then read his annual report, which consisted of a comprehensive survey of the society’s activities during 1922 and a statement of the present needs of the society. The Twenty-second Biennial Report, which recently has been distributed to members, embodies the material contained in the annual reports for both 1921 and 1922.

The annual address was delivered by Dr. William W. Folwell, vice president of the society and president emeritus of the University of Minnesota, who took as his subject “The Struggle for the Admission of Minnesota to the Union.” The deft characterizations, the scholarly analysis of a complicated situation, and the undercurrent of humor which marked the speaker’s delineations of motives, made the address profoundly interesting to the large audience, and this interest was heightened by the vigor and charm of the speaker’s delivery. The address was based upon the first chapter of the forthcoming second volume of Dr. Folwell’s History of Minnesota.

The speaker began by pointing out that the constitution of Minnesota, framed in 1857 by a process “irregular not to say scandalous,” was ratified on October 13, 1857, by the overwhelming plurality of 30,055 to 571. The official canvass of the vote, which was not completed until December 17, confirmed the election of the Democratic candidate, Henry H.

5 For a brief account of the Grand Portage exhibit see ante, p. 58.
Sibley, as the first governor of the state by the slender margin of 240 votes in a total of 35,340. Allegations of fraud were bandied by the party newspapers after the canvass, according to Dr. Folwell.

On December 2, 1857, the first state legislature, overwhelmingly Democratic in composition, assembled in accordance with a provision of the newly adopted state constitution. It was expected that an act admitting the state would be quickly passed in order to increase the Democratic majority in Congress. It was further anticipated that the act of admission would legitimate all the acts passed by the "ambiguous" state legislature before the legal expiration of the territorial government. The legislature proceeded, therefore, to "recognize" the territorial executive, Samuel Medary, as governor, and on December 19 elected Henry M. Rice and General James Shields as the first senators from Minnesota. Dr. Folwell devoted considerable attention to the active public career of General Shields.

The main body of the address dealt with the causes for the long delay of Minnesota's admission. The Minnesota constitution reached President Buchanan on January 6, 1858, and was submitted to the Senate on January 11 and at once referred to the committee on territories, the chairman of which was Stephen A. Douglas. The constitution, with a bill to admit Minnesota, was reported out on January 26. Not until May 11 was Minnesota admitted, however, and not until May 24, 1858, did the state officials who had been elected in the preceding October actually take the oath of office. Dr. Folwell quoted a southern senator who said, "If you admit Minnesota and exclude Kansas, the spirit of our revolutionary fathers is utterly extinct if the government can last for one short twelvemonth." In other words, southern senators and representatives desired that Kansas should be admitted with the Lecompton constitution before the case of any other applicant for statehood should be considered, "no matter if it did have the parliamentary right of way."
"The needless palaver over the admission of Minnesota covers nearly three hundred columns of the *Congressional Globe*, averaging nearly a thousand words each," said Dr. Folwell. The question as to how many representatives Minnesota should have occupied the Senate for nearly four days. The granting of the vote to aliens in Minnesota was the subject of a warm discussion in the House. Some opposition, like that of John Sherman, was based upon the charge that the constitution of Minnesota had been framed, not by a regular convention but by "two mobs," and that the election in October was "illegal and attended with fraud."

After the enactment of the English compromise on May 4, by which the final decision on the Kansas question was remitted to the people of that territory, the admission of Minnesota could not be delayed much longer, and on May 11 the state was admitted. The attitude of the waiting Minnesotans was expressed in the trenchant words which Dr. Folwell quoted from the inaugural message of Governor Sibley. Minnesota had been kept out of the Union for many months, said the state's first executive, "because it subserved the purposes of congressional politicians to allow her to remain suspended for an indefinite period, like the fabled coffin of the false prophet, between the heavens and the earth."

As "afterpieces to the comedy," Dr. Folwell described the case of William W. Kingsbury, who had been elected delegate from Minnesota Territory in October, 1857, and who declined to vacate his seat until he was summarily dismissed; and the case of Alpheus G. Fuller, who claimed to represent the excluded portion of Minnesota Territory and asked for admission as a delegate from the Territory of Dakota, the latter being identical with this excluded portion. Needless to say, he failed to get the seat.

Dr. Folwell closed his address by reviewing briefly the history of the first state legislature and its various acts, including the notorious "five million loan" amendment. After reassembling on June 2, 1858, this legislature devoted much of its
final labor to the engaging problem of using up an unexpended ten thousand dollars for legislative expenses. Appropriations for six thousand dollars for stationery and thirty-five hundred dollars for postage stamps solved this problem, a "culminating fiscal act which has had too many analogies in later and present days." The address as a whole exposed a situation in the late fifties which would startle those who conceive it to be the duty of the historian to glorify the past. But, "the story of the entrance of Minnesota into the Union, with its irregularities, procrastination, tricks, and blunders," said Dr. Folwell, "teaches the facility with which democracies may overcome such obstacles and reach their reasonable ends."

Following this address, the annual meeting came to a close with an informal reception for members of the society and their friends in the rooms of the museum. This delightful function was in charge of a committee of Minneapolis and St. Paul women consisting of Mrs. Charles E. Furness, Mrs. Charles W. Ames, Mrs. Charles P. Noyes, Mrs. Charles S. Pillsbury, Mrs. William G. Northup, Mrs. Frederick G. Ingersoll, Mrs. James H. Skinner, and Mrs. Roderic E. Daniel.