

## THE 1925 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The exchange of ideas, the giving of practical suggestions, the airing of new projects, and the development of plans for coöperation are some of the fruits which conferences among interested people — historians, statesmen, and business men, for example — not infrequently produce. Conferences on local history work in the state have proved their usefulness in the past and have now become an established feature of the annual meetings of the Minnesota Historical Society. On January 19, at 9:30 A. M., as the opening session of the seventy-sixth annual meeting, the fifth conference of Minnesota local history workers was held in the auditorium of the society's building, with an attendance of nearly sixty individuals representing local history activity and interest in at least fourteen counties: Chisago, Dakota, Carlton, Hennepin, Kandiyohi, McLeod, Olmsted, Ramsey, Redwood, Renville, Red Lake, Rice, St. Louis, and Waseca.

The general theme about which the discussion centered was "Making Local History Vital to the Community." The presiding officer, Mr. William E. Culkin of Duluth, president of the St. Louis County Historical Society, in opening the conference, directed attention to the importance of local history and declared that the people generally are very much interested in it, notwithstanding the doubts of some local history workers. The St. Louis County society holds four program meetings a year. The attendance is not large, Mr. Culkin said, but usually there are "from thirty to fifty splendid men and women who take an interest in history and love it." Newspaper publicity carries the story of the society's activity to all parts of the county and this stimulates interest on the part of the people — the common man and woman — in the past and their relation to it. Each person has his own point

of view, and few persons will agree; but the historian takes all into account and should attempt to enlist the aid of all. Membership will grow as the society's work develops—the St. Louis County Historical Society now, after two years of activity, has about 175 members. The society tends to become a “center of county historical feeling,” and to function properly it must be doing business all the time. Money received from dues is supplemented by an appropriation of \$2,500 received annually from the county. This enables the society to carry on its work satisfactorily, with its rooms open regularly, and its constantly growing collections of library and other material available for use. A broad view must be taken of the limits of a county society's work, for many topics of general regional interest are of first importance to such an organization. Although county lines were artificial in the beginning, administration and history have now made them of very real importance. To succeed in local history work it is necessary “to keep hammering away with faith and enthusiasm.” Careful planning is important in making programs. “Get papers written early,” said Mr. Culkin. “Get people to do work when they can, so that they can do their best work. Don't hurry.” The speaker closed by describing the method used by his society in indexing its material.<sup>1</sup>

The second speaker, Mr. Lynn Sheldon of Redwood Falls, county agricultural agent for Redwood County, spoke on the subject of “The Farmer and Local History.” Mr. Sheldon explained that he had become interested in the subject because it was necessary in his work. An adequate understanding of his own county's problems is impossible without knowing its historical background, he said. Steps toward the organization of a local historical society were taken a year or two ago, largely as a result of the interest of the county farm bureau. No organization has yet been effected. The speaker

<sup>1</sup> A brief account of the St. Louis County Historical Society's system of “historical bookkeeping” is in its report for 1923, printed *ante*, 5: 436-442.

indicated, however, that progress may be expected in the near future. He suggested that a new settler in the community, by studying its historical background, would be in a better position to adapt himself to the new conditions than if he were in ignorance of that background. History is of great value to the farmer; the formulation of economic laws, for example, is impossible without a knowledge of history; and many practical steps in agriculture, such as the regulation of crops, can be taken wisely only if the lessons of the past are learned. The speaker called attention also to the human interest of history and said that the farmers get much joy from an acquaintance with the past of their community. Collecting activities should be in constant progress in order that materials for the future historian may be assembled. In Redwood County there is need for a museum where old implements and other articles, such as early plows, ox carts, yokes, and spinning wheels, may be preserved. These things are not difficult to find but unless they are collected soon they may be definitely lost. The speaker closed by sketching a plan for enlisting the interest of the people in Redwood County in a local history organization, which he hoped might reach fruition by summer.

Dr. L. C. Weeks of Detroit, president of the Becker County Historical Society, who was unable to be present at the conference, sent a letter in which he told of the efforts made in Becker County to interest the schools in local history, described the activities of his society in collecting and binding county newspapers, and referred to its large collection of pictures and slides illustrating the county's past. Mrs. Ernest J. Stiefel of St. Paul spoke for the recently organized Ramsey County Historical Society, and explained that although it has not yet held any meetings it is making plans for a celebration to be held in March in honor of the birthday of the city of St. Paul. She also spoke of an historical map of St. Paul as a project which the Ramsey County society might attempt in the future.

Mr. Culkin suggested that local societies should hold meetings even "if there are only a half dozen people present." The important thing, he said, is not to get out crowds, but to organize the activities of the few people who take particular interest in the work. Newspaper publicity will carry the historical papers to a large audience.

Mr. Burt Eaton of Rochester spoke briefly on the situation in Olmsted County. Rochester has won a unique place in the world through the work of its famous doctors and both city and county need the well-organized activities of a local historical society. As an example of the color and interest of the community's pioneer history, he recounted the story of a frontier duel in Rochester. Mrs. Michael Dowling of Olivia, who spoke next, stressed the importance of interesting the younger people if local history is to be made vital to the community. Organization, the assembling of local history exhibits, the recording of pioneer reminiscences, and the use of pictures were among the means suggested for catching the attention and holding the interest of young people. The important thing, of course, is to aid them in understanding the vital relation of the past to the present.

In Kandiyohi County, said Mr. Victor E. Lawson, who was the next speaker, the old settlers' association, established in 1897, has been an active and useful organization which encourages the preparation of historical papers and in other ways serves as an historical society. The speaker indicated that he personally collects and carefully preserves newspapers and much ephemeral material for the county.

Mr. Frank E. Balmer, state leader of county agricultural agents, then spoke briefly, dwelling particularly upon the importance of developing in other counties of the state such projects as were under way in Redwood County. Practically all that is necessary in order to make local history vital to the farmer is to bring it to his attention. The speaker gave several illustrations of the importance of agricultural history

in the general history of a community and indicated that excellent opportunities for organization were open to Minnesota local history workers.

At the local history conference in 1922 Mr. Samuel Lord told of the work accomplished in 1919 by the Dodge County Old Settlers' Association in assembling a considerable number of reminiscent papers from old settlers, most of them having to do with Mantorville (see *ante*, 4: 251). Mr. Lord briefly reviewed the matter in the conference of this year and presented to the Minnesota Historical Society a bound volume of nearly five hundred typewritten pages, embodying all the materials gathered in 1919, with many interesting illustrations, constituting as a whole a remarkably interesting and valuable compendium of information about Mantorville. What was done at Mantorville could probably be done — and would be worth doing — in many other Minnesota communities. Mr. Lord's remarks brought to an end an unusually successful local history conference.

The luncheon of the Minnesota Historical Society to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the society was held at the St. Paul Athletic Club at 12:30 P. M., with 124 persons participating. The toastmaster, who was introduced by Mr. Frederick G. Ingersoll of St. Paul, was the Honorable Theodore Christianson, Governor of Minnesota. In his introductory remarks the Governor first gave expression to his deep interest in the work of the Minnesota Historical Society. His own forbears, he explained, played a modest but useful part in the early history of the state, and he himself has the distinction of being the first governor of Minnesota whose father was a native of the state and whose ancestors were living in the state at the time of its admission to the Union. The program of toasts which followed was intended as a sweeping survey of the period which has elapsed "Since the Foundation," that is, since 1849, when the society was established. The society, as is well known, was chartered on October 20, 1849, and formally organized on the following

November 15. Its first public affair was a meeting held in St. Paul on January 1, 1850, and its first annual meeting was held on January 14 of the same year, when a constitution was adopted. Actually, therefore, although the 1925 meeting was the seventy-sixth annual meeting of the society, it occurred almost exactly seventy-five years after activities were launched.

Of Dr. William W. Folwell, president of the Minnesota Historical Society and president emeritus of the University of Minnesota, who was to have given a toast on the subject, "In the Beginning, 1849," the Governor happily remarked, "He spent the first part of his life in making Minnesota history and is spending the last part in writing it." Dr. Folwell was unable to be present at the luncheon, but he communicated an interesting document containing a description of Minnesota conditions in 1849, which, at his request, was read by Dr. Solon J. Buck, superintendent of the society. The document in question is eminently worthy of publication and is printed in these pages under the title "Minnesota in 1849: An Imaginary Letter."

The second speaker was Dr. James Kendall Hosmer, noted historian and formerly Minneapolis public librarian, whose theme was "Through a Half Century, 1850-1900." In a delightful introduction Dr. Hosmer designated Dr. Folwell as patriarch of the Minnesota Historical Society and himself assumed the title of assistant patriarch. After a brief review of the development of the society, he drew attention to some of the major events and influences in the history of the state. Speaking of its population he emphasized the fact that the major racial streams were Nordic, drawn from northern New England, northern New York, and northern Europe. Alluding to Minnesota's early Indian and Civil war experiences, he compared the state to the infant Hercules, who was beset in his cradle by serpents and in struggling with them developed the strength which made him chief among the gods. Peaceful development followed the wars, and the speaker referred to Minnesota's growth and development not only in

“the world of economics,” — mention was made of the timber, wheat, flour, and iron industries, — but also in education and libraries, and in general culture.

Dr. Warren Upham, archeologist of the Minnesota Historical Society and secretary from 1895 to 1914, then gave a brief account of the fiftieth anniversary celebration held by the society in 1899. A full account of that occasion is published in volume 9 of the *Minnesota Historical Collections*.

“The Last Quarter Century, 1900–1925” was the subject discussed by the next speaker, Dr. Lester B. Shippee of the University of Minnesota, an authority upon the recent history of the United States. When the country emerged into the twentieth century, he said, it had just come out of a “short, satisfactory, and wholly unnecessary” war, and it was brought up sharply by a set of problems which it had previously ignored. A period of soul-searching ensued and people began to probe into things which they hitherto had accepted without question. In the matter of international relations the country participated in two Hague conferences, and in the middle quarter century was preparing to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of peace with England. Then came the World War. In considering the twenty-five years which have elapsed since 1900, one is inclined to waver between the profoundest pessimism and lightening optimism, the speaker declared. The failure of mankind to profit from the past is one side of the story. On the other hand, there is ground for optimism in the fact that people seem to be evidencing an increased interest in the past, and this may pave the way to a better understanding of current national and world problems. Too much importance should not be attached to a mere quarter century, which, after all, is only a small segment in the long stretch of time in which civilization has been developing.

Dr. Buck was to have discussed the topic “What of the Future?” but owing to the lateness of the hour he contented himself with the somewhat cryptic remark, “The future will

speak for itself." Among the guests at the luncheon was Professor C. K. Webster of the University of Wales, who responded briefly to the toastmaster's invitation to speak, and touched upon the appreciation of the things of the past which, in his opinion, characterizes the American people. At the conclusion of the luncheon program Governor Christianson expressed the belief that the coming together of men and women from different parts of the state for the annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society inevitably meant new inspiration and added momentum in the carrying on of historical work in Minnesota. An interesting feature of the program was a group of songs characteristic of different periods in the past, sung by Miss Hazel Ohman, accompanied by Miss Livia Appel.

About seventy persons attended the afternoon session, which convened at 3:30 P.M. in the auditorium of the Historical Building, with Mr. Victor E. Lawson of Willmar in the chair. The following address by the president of the society, Dr. Folwell, was then read by the chairman.

If the seventy-fifth year of the society's existence has been the most prosperous of all it is not because of any magic in arabic numerals, but because of the continued faithful service of our competent staff, the careful husbanding of resources all under wise and intelligent direction. The reports now to be submitted to you will justify this statement. The report of the superintendent will exhibit the activities of the society for the year — the increase of the library, the enrichment of the museum, and the unusual number of publications issued; and the report of our treasurer, Mr. Everett H. Bailey, how the funds have been distributed to the various purposes.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to express my — and your — appreciation of the services which Mr. Bailey has rendered the society as its treasurer for many years. Such services are not of the spectacular kind and are likely to be left unregarded.

My enlarging acquaintance with its affairs convinces me that if this Minnesota Historical Society is merely to carry on its present modest scheme of activities a considerable addi-

tion must be made for support and endowment. The poor, shrunken, emaciated gold dollar, ironically bearing the image and superscription of the triumphant, soaring eagle of the sky, has lost more than a third of its purchasing power in the past decade. A thousand dollars as tallied are but 635 to buy books and have them bound, and to pay salaries.

For the great future expansion of the functions of the society, which her history, her situation, and the renown of Minnesota will demand, a very great increment of income must be assured. I make no suggestion of amount for fear of being thought extreme, but leave that for your imaginations to play around. For this great purpose it seems to me we must hope for generous endowments by private citizens.

But this is no new discovery of my own. The society already possesses a permanent trust fund of about \$125,000. The accumulation of this fund is due to the foresight and prudent management of two men. Henry C. Upham was treasurer for thirty-three years, during which the fund was raised from \$1,500 to \$75,000. The remaining \$50,000 has been added by the equal care and prudence of Mr. Bailey. Let us hope that Mr. Bailey may be willing to continue in his office for many years and double the permanent trust fund.

At the last annual meeting I spoke briefly, regretting the long delay by the society in establishing an authentic, contemporaneous, and perpetual chronology of Minnesota events. I have now the pleasure to say that Dr. Upham has undertaken and begun that service. It is also his intention to compile a complete chronology from the time of the earliest French arrivals to November 4, 1924, the date on which his new record of current events begins.

After the reading of the minutes of the last annual meeting and the presentation of the treasurer's report, the superintendent's report — a combined survey of the activities of the society during the past year and during the last decade — was given.<sup>2</sup> Three historical papers were then read, the first of which was entitled "Robert Dickson and the Western Bound-

<sup>2</sup> The *Twenty-third Biennial Report*, which has recently been distributed to members of the Minnesota Historical Society, embodies the material contained in the annual reports for both 1923 and 1924.

ary of Minnesota." Its author, Mr. Louis A. Tohill, instructor in the University High School, Minneapolis, has made, through a careful study of unpublished sources, an important contribution to Minnesota history by tracing in detail the career of a famous early fur-trader. It is expected that Mr. Tohill's illuminating study will later be presented in full to the readers of this magazine and it is therefore sufficient to note here that special attention was given by the speaker to the designs of Dickson upon the Red River Valley after the War of 1812. The fur trade carried on by Dickson with the Sioux Indians had been destroyed by the war and he himself was excluded from American territory. He and Lord Selkirk expected, however, that the Red River Valley would be assigned to the British by the Anglo-American convention of 1818, and Dickson intended to renew the fur trade in this region and also, perhaps, to establish a buffalo wool factory. All his hopes in this direction were blighted, however, by the cession of the valley, as far as the forty-ninth parallel, to the United States.

The second paper was Mr. Wright T. Orcutt's interesting analysis of "The Minnesota Lumberjack," which is published in this number of MINNESOTA HISTORY. Mr. Orcutt demonstrated in effective fashion the importance of what one might term historical type studies for the broader social history of the state.

The third paper of the session, on "The Influence of the Minneapolis Flour Mills in the Economic Development of Minnesota and the Northwest," by Dr. Charles B. Kuhlmann, professor of economics in Hamline University, St. Paul, was based upon an extensive study of the Minneapolis flour-milling industry, which is soon to be published in book form. As a valuable interpretation of an important Minnesota industry, the paper possesses general interest and will be printed in full in a later issue of this magazine.

A special meeting of the executive council of the society was held in the superintendent's office at 4:45 P. M., at which

ways and means of providing for the increased needs of the society were discussed. A tour of the museum, scheduled for the same hour, was omitted because the afternoon session was protracted. It should be noted that a special exhibit representing "Seventy-five Years of the Minnesota Historical Society" was on display in the museum during the annual meeting.

About 225 persons were present at the evening session, held in the west hall of the society's museum, at which the annual address was delivered by Frank H. Hodder, professor of history in the University of Kansas and president of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, who took as his subject "The Background of the Kansas-Nebraska Act." The speaker's mastery of the sources, his careful analysis and clear presentation of his subject, and his original scholarship made the address, which dealt with a notable theme, a memorable one. At its conclusion, Dr. Buck, who presided at the session, declared that the speaker's views, if accepted by historians, will revolutionize American historical thinking with reference to an extremely important development in the fifties. Professor Hodder began by pointing out that the Kansas-Nebraska Act is one of the great turning points in American history because by its repeal of the Missouri Compromise, it completed the breach between the sections, created the Republican party, and precipitated the Civil War. With respect to no subject in our history, he said, has historical opinion so completely changed in recent years. The older view, based upon antislavery propoganda, was that Senator Stephen A. Douglas repealed the Missouri Compromise in order to secure for himself southern support for the presidency and that Nebraska was divided into two territories in order that one might be slave and the other free. A reëxamination of the background of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, however, discloses the fact that the territories were organized in order to secure a northern route for the Pacific railroad, and that the division into two territories was made for the

benefit of the railway interests of Iowa and Illinois. Not only was Douglas not currying favor with the South but he would have sacrificed the support that he already had in that section had his real purpose been discovered.

The story has its beginnings in the middle forties. The question of a Pacific railroad was first raised by Asa Whitney in 1845 by a request for a vast grant of land to himself for the purpose of building a road from Lake Michigan above Milwaukee. Professor Hodder stated that he has in his possession one of the only two known copies of a pamphlet published by Douglas opposing both Whitney's plan and his route and proposing instead that the road should run from Chicago by way of Council Bluffs and South Pass to the Pacific, that the territories of Nebraska and Oregon be organized, that grants of alternate sections of public land along the line of the road be made to these territories to enable them to construct it, and that similar grants be made to Iowa, Missouri, and Arkansas to enable them to build roads to connect with it. Douglas was prevented from immediately carrying out his purpose by the instruction of the Illinois legislature to support Whitney's scheme, but in 1850 he secured the adoption of his mode of building railroads by the grant to the Illinois Central and the Mobile and Ohio.

In 1848 David R. Atchison of Missouri, Augustus C. Dodge and George W. Jones of Iowa, and Solon Borland of Arkansas began agitating for land grants to their own states to enable them to build connecting roads, assisted by Douglas and James Shields of Illinois. While Douglas desired a Chicago terminal, Illinois would also be benefited by a St. Louis terminal. The grants to Missouri and Arkansas were made in 1852 and 1853, but the one to Iowa was delayed until 1856.

At the beginning of 1854, according to Professor Hodder, it seemed certain that the route of the Pacific railroad would be immediately located. Jefferson Davis, who was secretary of war and a strong friend of the southern route, had sent

Gadsden to Mexico and had secured a treaty granting to the United States the most favorable route. The surveys reported by Congress under the direction of the secretary of war were required to be submitted by the first Monday in February. The territory through which the southern route would pass was already organized and the northern route would have no chance unless the territory through which it would pass could also be organized. For this purpose Douglas, Dodge, and Atchison united to pass the Kansas-Nebraska Act. To secure its passage Douglas was forced to consent to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. To secure what he regarded as the greater end he sacrificed what he regarded as less important, believing sincerely that slavery would not make headway in this region. Almost certainly, said the speaker in conclusion, the first Pacific railroad would have been ordered by the southern route had not Kansas and Nebraska been organized. As it was, the sectional controversy prevented the location of any road until after the Civil War broke out, when Douglas' plan and route were adopted. The curious result has been that Douglas for trying to serve his section has rested under the obloquy of having betrayed it.

After the conclusion of this powerful and interesting address, a moving picture entitled "Vincennes" was shown. The film is one of the "Chronicles of America Photoplays" planned by Yale University and based upon the fifty-volume historical series known as the *Chronicles of America*. "Vincennes" is an adaptation from Frederic A. Ogg's *The Old Northwest* and gives a vivid and interesting representation of the exploits of George Rogers Clark, particularly his famous winter dash in 1779, which resulted in the capture of Vincennes, the headquarters of Hamilton, the British governor-general in the Northwest. It is of interest to note that, according to a Yale University announcement, "the minutest details of this vivid picture were referred for criticism and confirmation" to Professor Clarence W. Alvord, a member of the Minnesota Historical Society. "Vincennes" was pre-

sented by courtesy of Yale University and the Pathé Exchange, Incorporated. During the showing of the picture Mrs. Charlotte Thorn Elliott of St. Paul played a number of appropriate piano selections.

The final event of the annual meeting was an informal reception for members of the society and their friends, held in the society's auditorium after the evening session and attended by about 175 persons, with Mrs. Elizabeth H. Buck and Mrs. Clara W. Blegen acting as hostesses.

T. C. B.



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