

THE 1926 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The seventy-seventh annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society, held in St. Paul on January 11, was opened at 10:00 A.M. in the auditorium of the Historical Building with a session devoted to the sixth annual local history conference, with Dr. Solon J. Buck, the superintendent, presiding, and approximately fifty people, representing eleven counties, — Hennepin, Ramsey, Olmsted, St. Louis, Pipestone, Lake, Chisago, Watonwan, Waseca, Rice, and Dakota, — in attendance.

Two new county historical societies have been organized in the state since the last conference, and it was therefore fitting that in opening the meeting Dr. Buck should call attention to the material increase of historical interest in Minnesota and to its recent local manifestations. He pointed out that although the movement for local history organization is steadily gaining ground in the state, its rate of progress should be accelerated, for the thing involved is nothing less than the advance of the study of human relations. All are familiar, he said, with the great transformation that has occurred in science during the last generation or two. The public must be made to realize that today the general field of human relations, not less than that of natural science, needs study, widespread support, and the development that only an awakened and general interest can sustain. Obviously both local history and general history, in order to make their largest contributions to this broader human study, must have behind them effective organization of effort. Local history development in Minnesota may therefore be considered part of a wide movement that possesses general human significance.

Mrs. R. B. Elliott of Two Harbors, the first speaker, told of local history activity along the "North Shore" — in Lake

and Cook counties. The newly organized historical societies in these counties, she said, have excellent prospects, for there is much local interest in the work and the St. Louis County Historical Society has set an excellent example of efficiency. The lure of the historical backgrounds of the North Shore was made clear by Mrs. Elliott when she sketched its history from the days of the French explorers through the fur trade period — when Grand Portage was in its heyday — and down to the era of mines, railways, and towns.

Mrs. Will Curtis of St. James then discussed "The Relation of the State Federation of Women's Clubs to Local History Work in Minnesota." She first outlined a plan for collecting historical material in each locality through the women's clubs and for making it available in notebook form for school use, and as an illustration she exhibited such a notebook for Watonwan County containing pioneer letters, an account of the early schools of the region, and other interesting features. Mrs. Curtis then described the local history essay contest for high school pupils conducted by the Minnesota Historical Society and the federation. She said that the contest is not only stimulating the study of Minnesota history in the schools but also arousing the interest of club women, of newspaper editors, and of many other citizens in both local and state history.

Mr. Archie W. Troelstrup of Cambridge, the next speaker, spoke on "Local History Development in Isanti County" and told of the work done in the Cambridge High School, where in 1924 he introduced a course combining Minnesota with American history. Among the pupils interest was aroused in old manuscripts and illustrative objects such as arrowheads and household articles, and the collecting activity thus stimulated led to the establishment of a small historical museum. A room in the high school building was devoted to the museum and an unsolicited donation of two hundred dollars by the senior class used for equipment. Thus the work has been placed on a secure footing and many valuable items have

already been secured, including a collection of Isanti County newspapers for the period from 1874 to 1881.

Mr. Burt W. Eaton of Rochester, a member of the executive council of the Minnesota Historical Society, was next introduced and gave a talk on "Local History Prospects in Olmsted County." He made it clear that a local historical society was about to be organized in that county. Interest, promise of activity, newspaper support, and coöperation with the state society — all these were assured. The problem of a permanent home for the proposed society had not yet been solved, but he declared that one would be found somewhere in Rochester. The speaker indicated that the local history essay contest was producing good fruit in Olmsted County and told of his experience in addressing the students of one high school where interest had been developed by the contest. Mr. Eaton gave illustrations of the interest of Olmsted County backgrounds in three fields, the political evolution of the county, the history of Rochester as a medical center, and the part played by individual men and women. He closed with a tribute to Colonel James George, a Rochester man who gave distinguished service as an officer in the Civil War.

Dr. Buck then called upon the outstanding leader in Minnesota local history work, Mr. William E. Culkin of Duluth, president of the St. Louis County Historical Society. The one way to organize a local historical society, Mr. Culkin said, is to go ahead and organize it. He declared that the people of a community are naturally interested in its history and can be depended upon to support the work. A local historical society is a great pool of information, he said, into which many rivulets are flowing, and it is also a source upon which many people and interests in the community soon learn to draw.

The presiding officer, in commenting upon Mr. Culkin's wise rule for organizing a society, said that a number of failures to organize local historical societies have been due merely to the fact that those interested did not have sufficient confidence and courage to "go ahead." In a sense the object of the confer-

ence is to exchange practical ideas about local history organization, to bring out the objects and possibilities of the work, and to encourage those who are interested to push on and to promote historical activity in the localities. Given interest and activity on the part of even a few, there will be no failure.

Among those present at the conference was Mrs. Alexander A. Milne of St. Paul, a daughter of William Pitt Murray, who presented some interesting facts concerning St. Paul back-grounds and touched on some aspects of the work of the Sibley House Association, of which she is an official.

The annual luncheon was held at the St. Paul Hotel at 12:30 P.M. with ninety persons participating. The toast-master, who was introduced by Mr. Frederick C. Ingersoll of St. Paul, was Dr. Clyde A. Duniway, professor of history at Carleton College, and the first speaker was Dr. Edward G. Cheyney, professor of forestry in the University of Minnesota, who spoke on "The History of Minnesota's Forests."

Minnesota was originally settled by people who came from a hardwood country, Dr. Cheyney said, and two circumstances account for their settlement in southeastern Minnesota: the fact that the remainder of the state had not been acquired from the Indians; and the similarity of the forests of the southeast to those in the country from which they had come. As in the eastern part of the United States, in southeastern Minnesota the timber was cut to clear the land for agriculture and the logs were a by-product. It was not land hunger, however, but the hope of profit from the logging of timber that drove people into the northern end of the state. The first sawmill was established at Marine and the first pine timber cut in 1837, when there were only a few thousand people in Minnesota and the vast prairies were as yet unpeopled. Prairie settlement hastened the cutting of timber somewhat, but it was timber for the building of prairie homes, not northern land, that led many to go to the woods.

In 1847 the first commercial sawmill was built in Minneapolis and the first logging operation inaugurated on the Missis-

issippi River. Then prairie settlement got under way, population grew apace, and the demand for lumber exceeded anything the lumbermen ever dreamed of. In 1870 the lumber industry had pushed its operations to Little Falls. Already Duluth mills were flirting with the trade of the Great Lakes opened up by the waning of the supply in Michigan and Wisconsin. The railroad, which came to St. Paul in 1867 and to Duluth in 1870, opened up new vistas to the loggers, for they were no longer confined closely to the streams.

The first mill at Cloquet was built in 1878, above the big falls at Thomson which made it impossible to drive the logs from the Cloquet River and its tributaries to Duluth. This new mill town soon led the North and now leads the whole state in lumber production, and important progress has been made there toward the complete utilization of the forest products. About 1900, railroads began to thread the North, concentrating on Bemidji from Brainerd, Duluth, and Wadena; and they pushed east from Duluth to Knife River and north to Virginia and International Falls. These roads were primarily timber carriers.

The speaker in conclusion pointed out that by 1905 Minnesota had passed the peak of its lumber production. It was on a down grade that has left it today with fourteen million acres of cut-over lands, a production about half as great as its consumption, and an idle land problem that will tax the wisdom of its citizens to the limit. "For it must always be remembered," Dr. Cheyney declared, "that the forest was cut for the logs, not for the land. The logs are gone, the land is not wanted, and only the taxes remain. To enable these lands to pay their own taxes is the biggest economic problem which the state has before it today."

The luncheon program was concluded by Mr. Theodore C. Blegen, assistant superintendent of the society and professor of history at Hamline University, who gave an address entitled "Interpreting Minnesota" in which an attempt was made to analyze the aspects of Minnesota and its history that mark the

state in a distinctive way, and to evaluate the place of Minnesota in the family of states today.¹

The afternoon session, which convened at three o'clock, was attended by about a hundred people. Dr. William W. Folwell, president of the society and president emeritus of the University of Minnesota, was in the chair and opened the meeting by reading a brief presidential address. He pointed out that although many have helped and contributed to the society's growth and widening influence, "the main credit must be accorded to a few devoted men laboring for love rather than for pay." The period of Dr. Edward D. Neill's service as secretary for twelve years ending in 1863 was characterized as one of "small but hopeful beginnings," and Dr. Folwell declared that Neill's *History of Minnesota* is a work that "will remain, in the words of Thucydides, 'a treasure forever.'" The services of John Fletcher Williams, ending in 1893, covered a period of twenty-six years — a time when "with a permanent home in the low dark basement of the old capitol the society prospered according to its income." Seven volumes of the society's *Collections* were brought out, including Williams' *History of the City of St. Paul and of the County of Ramsey*, "a work of conspicuous merit as a source of local history, with important contributions to that of the territory and state."

Dr. Warren Upham's service as secretary and librarian lasted nineteen years, from 1895 to 1914, a period of "continued and steady progress." Dr. Folwell called special attention to the great growth of the society's library and its museum under Dr. Upham's leadership. Eight volumes of *Minnesota Historical Collections* (8 to 15 inclusive) were brought out by Dr. Upham, and one of these, the collection of *Minnesota Biographies, 1655 to 1912* (vol. 14) was characterized as "a most admirable and convenient Minnesota 'Who's Who.'" Dr. Upham's later *Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin*

¹ A more detailed report of an earlier address on this theme by the same speaker is published *ante*, 6: 256-257.

and Historic Significance was described as "an equally admirable Minnesota 'There's Where.'" The speaker also referred to "our tardily begun continuous chronology of Minnesota events," now being prepared by Dr. Upham. The present superintendent and secretary, Dr. Solon J. Buck, who assumed office in 1914, was trained in "the modern school of American historians" and, said Dr. Folwell, has naturally given "a new direction to the purely historical work of the society." He has appreciated the narratives and eulogies of "old settlers and amateurs caught on the wing," but has given his attention primarily to "arraying the facts which constitute our state's history in proper sequence and proportion and verifying them" from original, contemporary sources. "The example thus set," said Dr. Folwell, "is already taking effect in our schools, magazines, and newspapers." Attention was also called to the continued building up of the society's collections and the progress of its various activities.

Dr. Folwell then turned to the problem of the society's newspaper collection, and particularly commented on the great change in the character of newspapers since the society began its comprehensive collection. The enormous size of modern newspapers, the mass of advertising matter that they contain, and the poor quality of the paper stock used may make necessary, he indicated, a change of policy on the part of the society. The establishment of a system of carefully kept scrap books was suggested as a possible alternative to the present comprehensive preservation of newspaper files.

Dr. Folwell concluded his address by complimenting the members of the society's staff, who "all look good and work faithfully for the moderate salaries we are able to afford in the cheap dollars of the day." He drew special attention to the services of the newspaper librarian, Mr. John Talman. The recent change by which the society has been designated an "agency of the state" and brought within the scope of the financial supervision of the state department of administration and finance Dr. Folwell viewed with equanimity. He declared

that in his opinion, under the new system, "legislatures will be the more willing to grant us the appropriations we shall endeavor to deserve and trust us for judicious expenditure under superior control."

Following the president's address, the state of the society's finances was reported by the treasurer, Mr. Everett H. Bailey of St. Paul, and a survey of the activities of the society during 1925 was presented as the annual report of the superintendent, Dr. Buck. A paper on "Ramsay Crooks and the Fur Trade of the Northwest" was then read by Mr. J. Ward Ruckman of Minneapolis. This interesting study of a prominent figure in the history of Minnesota and the West is printed in full in the present number of MINNESOTA HISTORY. A closely related theme was dealt with by Dr. Grace Lee Nute, curator of manuscripts for the Minnesota Historical Society, in her paper on "The American Fur Company's Fishing Enterprises on Lake Superior."² She described the American Fur Company as an early, probably the earliest, example of "big business" in the history of the United States. Though its main activity was the securing and marketing of furs, skins, and buffalo robes, it maintained several subsidiary enterprises, one of which was its fisheries on Lake Superior. This collateral business was begun after Ramsay Crooks became president of the company in 1834. Vessels were built for service on the lakes and the inland headquarters of the concern were moved from Mackinac to La Pointe. This place, Dr. Nute said, was made the center of the fishing business from which boats, fishermen, and supplies were sent to various substations, and to which the fish were transported after having been caught and salted. The chief fishing stations were at Fond du Lac, Isle Encampment (near

² Dr. Nute's paper was first read by her at a joint meeting of the American Historical Association and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association at Ann Arbor, Michigan, on December 30, 1925, and it is being brought out in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* for March. Large excerpts of the paper are published in the *Minneapolis Journal* for January 17 under the title, "Rise and Fall of Minnesota's First Great Industry Revealed as Romance of Business 100 Years Ago."

Two Harbors), Grand Portage, Isle Royale, the Anse (now Point Keweenaw), Grand Island, and White Fish Point; and many minor posts were also established. Whitefish, siscowet, trout, pickerel, and herring were the usual varieties that were caught, and these were sent to La Pointe and thence to Detroit, for sale in Michigan and Ohio.

In 1838 the number of barrels shipped to Detroit was four thousand, and the following season's catch was even greater, approximately fifty-five hundred barrels — too great a yield, in fact, for disposal in the usual markets. Accordingly a new policy was adopted: that of developing a market for lake fish. From 1839 until 1842, according to the speaker, strenuous efforts were made to sell Lake Superior fish in New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Tennessee, Kentucky, along the banks of the Mississippi from New Orleans to St. Louis, up the Red River and the Arkansas, and in the newly settled regions of Texas. Large quantities of fish were sent to be marketed in these regions and sales might have proved successful had not the period been one of extreme depression consequent on the panic of 1837. In 1842 the American Fur Company failed and the fishing enterprise came to an unsuccessful close.

Dr. Nute asserted that since several of the company's important posts were located within the present boundaries of Minnesota, fishing may be considered Minnesota's second industry, the first being the fur trade. The chief promoters of the business are well-known characters in Minnesota history, particularly Ramsay Crooks, whose half-breed daughter Hester married the famous missionary, William T. Boutwell, and whose son William was a colonel in the Civil War and a noted railroad promoter in the state. Descendants of Gabriel Franchere and of his stepson, John Prince, both of whom were agents for the marketing of the fish, reside now in the state. Prince himself was mayor of St. Paul from 1860 to 1862. The agents in charge of the entire fishing enterprise were Lyman Warren, for the years 1834 to 1838, and Charles W. Borup, for the remainder of the period, both of whom were intimately

connected with later Minnesota developments. Warren's son William wrote the standard book on the Ojibways in Minnesota, and Borup became a prominent banker in St. Paul. Thus the fishing industry described by Dr. Nute possesses a special interest for Minnesota history.

A replica of a pioneer log cabin of the fifties, which has been erected in the East Hall of the society's museum with the coöperation of the state timber and forestry officials, was given its first public showing during the meeting. At the conclusion of the afternoon session Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the museum, gave a brief talk about the cabin and invited all who were present to view it. A special meeting of the executive council of the society was held in the superintendent's office at 4:45 P.M.

The last session of the annual meeting was held in the auditorium of the Historical Building at 8:00 P.M., with Mr. Frederick G. Ingersoll, first vice president, presiding, and with an audience of approximately two hundred persons in attendance. The annual address was given by Dr. Norman S. B. Gras, professor of economic history in the university, on "The Significance of the Twin Cities for Minnesota History." Dr. Gras's interpretation of the history of the Northwest in terms of the development of a great metropolitan center serving and being served by a vast hinterland transcending state boundaries awakened the interest not only of his immediate audience but also of a considerable portion of the press of the state. In particular his suggestion of a chamber of state officials to establish a working alliance between Minnesota and the Dakotas and Montana — broadly speaking the economic area that he regards as tributary to the Twin Cities — called forth much discussion. Thus the *St. Paul Dispatch* in an editorial on "A Regional Entente," in its issue for January 13, strongly indorsed the idea and called upon the Northwest to make the practical application that he suggested. Of Dr. Gras the *Dispatch* says, "He is out in advance, it is true, seeing clearly what some only glimpse, and glimpsing evolutions to which some are wholly

blind. But facts discernible to every one do bear him out and demonstrate that the common urge is in the direction of his thinking." Dr. Gras's paper, which is brought out in the present number of *MINNESOTA HISTORY*, will greatly interest all readers of the magazine, whether or not they agree with the views to which he commits himself.

Following the annual address Mr. Frank M. Warren of Minneapolis gave a delightful illustrated talk on "Isle Royale, Past and Present." He began with an account of the geographical features of the famous island and discussed the evidences found on it of prehistoric copper mining. He then told of the exploration, surveys, and later development of the island, and proceeded to illustrate his points with a remarkable series of slides. The exact location and shape of the island, the remains of early mines, the beauty of forests, bays, sunsets, and sunrises, and the marvelous wild life that abounds on Isle Royale — all these were visualized. Mr. Warren demonstrated not only that he was in love with his theme but also that he had studied with meticulous care the geographic features and the natural life of the island, and many of his slides afforded thrilling proof of his skill as a photographer of wild life. After the exhibition of slides, Mr. Warren presented a moving picture that he himself had taken, and although all of it was interesting the audience was particularly captivated by the portion devoted to moose. "There are probably more moose to the square mile on Isle Royale today," said Mr. Warren, "than in any equal area of North America. These creatures, the largest members of the deer family, are fast being destroyed. Soon, unless they are adequately protected, they will have gone the way of the wild pigeon and the buffalo." Mr. Warren declared that Isle Royale, "with its forests and wild life, should be preserved as it is for the generations to come." There is danger that axe, saw, and fires will destroy its timber and that its moose may be slaughtered. The solution, in Mr. Warren's opinion, is that Isle Royale should be taken over by the United States as a forest and wild life pre-

serve. The whole matter was put in a nutshell by the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in an editorial on January 24 that indorsed the movement to make this "living replica of America's primeval beauty" a federal possession.

The last event of the annual meeting was an informal reception in the museum attended by about 175 members of the society and their friends. The center of attraction was the newly installed log cabin, equipped with genuine pioneer furnishings and intended to reproduce as exactly as possible the actual home of an early pioneer. In the cabin three members of the society's staff, Miss Irene Bulov, Miss Constance Humphrey, and Miss Elizabeth Sergent, who were dressed in the quaint costume of the middle fifties, gave an added touch of reality to the scene.

T. C. B.



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