

THE PROMOTION OF AMERICAN HISTORY AND OF HISTORY IN AMERICA¹

“The Promotion of American History and of History in America,” a text taken from the charter of the American Historical Association, epitomizes both the record of the association during its career of over forty years and its purposes for the future.

Among the outstanding achievements of the association are the development of professional and scientific spirit among its members through its annual meetings; and the publication of the *American Historical Review*, generally recognized as the leading historical periodical in the world, and of a long series of *Reports*, containing not only accounts of meetings and papers read at them but important collections of documents and bibliographies of great value to research workers. The prizes offered annually by the association for the best studies in certain fields have stimulated scholarly research, and its various committees on the teaching of history have largely shaped the history curriculum in the schools of the nation. The Public Archives Commission set up by the association has made known to scholars the valuable materials for history in the archives of the states and has promoted measures for the better care of such materials. Another subsidiary body, the Historical Manuscripts Commission, has located and edited for publication important collections of private papers such as those of Calhoun and Austin, the diary of Salmon P. Chase, and the autobiography of Martin Van Buren.

A bibliography of the publications of historical societies was brought out about 1905, and the committee on bibliography now has nearly ready for publication a “Manual of Historical

¹This address was delivered at the luncheon session of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association in Springfield, Illinois, on May 7.

Literature " that will be a *vade mecum* for librarians, students, and even general readers. A committee on the writing of history, of which former Ambassador Jusserand was chairman, has prepared a book on the subject, now in press, which is expected to improve the quality of historical writing; a committee on research in colleges is devising ways and means to make it possible for men connected with the smaller institutions to work together on important projects; a committee on documentary historical publications of the United States government is working for the publication of the papers of the territories in the United States archives; a committee on national archives is striving to bring about the erection of an archives building and the more adequate care of the records of the federal government; and a Conference of Historical Societies, subsidiary to the association, has promoted important coöperative work such as the calendaring of documents for Mississippi Valley history in France, and serves as a clearing house for the activities and problems of these societies scattered all over the country.

Recently the association joined in the organization of the Council of Learned Societies, the American representative in the International Union of Academies, and its representatives in the council played the leading part in making arrangements for a great " Dictionary of American Biography " that is now being prepared. The association has taken a leading part in the meetings of the International Congresses of History since 1903 and has recently secured a subvention of twenty-five thousand dollars from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial to be used in promoting the organization of a permanent International Committee of Historical Sciences, which expects to bring together in the near future, for the first time since the war, a congress of historians from all countries of the world.

All these activities, with the exception of the last, have been carried on with very limited funds, made up of the dues of members, a very small appropriation from the government for

the publication of the *Reports*, and of late the income from an endowment fund of about fifty thousand dollars. This has been possible because the members have been willing to give their services gratuitously for the promotion of the cause of history. There is no reason to believe that they will not continue to do so in the future, but more funds are needed for the mobilization of their services, for necessary expenses, for publication, and for new activities that are called for by new conditions and the widening of the field of history.

This need can best be indicated by calling attention to some of the things that the association might do if it had adequate funds at its disposal.

It might survey the field of research in American history, locate serious gaps in our knowledge, and promote research in coöperation with representatives of the other social sciences in selected subjects such as immigration, sectionalism, agriculture, transportation, business organization, international relations, and legal institutions.

It might promote individual research in all fields of history by grants to assist scholars to meet the expenses of their work.

It might publish more extensively volumes of source materials prepared by the Historical Manuscripts Commission, several of which are now ready but are held up by lack of funds.

It might publish a volume of material from the federal archives and thus perhaps pave the way for more adequate and scholarly work of this sort by the federal government.

It might expand its bibliographical services, completing and publishing the bibliography of travel in America that has long been under way, bringing out a new edition of Larned's *Literature of American History*, and making more up-to-date the annual volumes of *Writings on American History*.

It might procure the compilation of guides to and calendars of important materials in foreign archives.

It might through the Public Archives Commission complete and bring up to date the inventories of state and local archives

and bring out a "Primer of Archives," long in course of preparation, that would be of great help to those who have the custody of records.

It might through the Historical Manuscripts Commission make a thorough inventory of nonarchival manuscript materials for history in various depositories and in private hands, make them known to scholars, and promote their preservation.

It might publish a series of studies embodying the results of coöperative and individual research, giving preference to important works that would not be likely to be brought out by a commercial publisher.

It might through the Conference of Historical Societies make a thorough study of state, local, and special historical organizations and agencies, and promote and correlate their work.

It might advance interest in and knowledge of history on the part of the general public by supplying the press with news about historical activities and by publishing a popular magazine of history.

It might establish a history house or at least adequate offices in Washington to serve as a national center for history and historians.

It might provide a permanent secretariat to plan and correlate the activities of the association and to be continuously on the job of promoting American history and history in America.

The movement to raise an endowment fund was started nearly a decade ago but only recently has it been possible to get the work actively under way. A general committee has been set up with former Senator Beveridge as chairman and Professor Evarts B. Greene of Columbia as vice chairman, and headquarters have been established in the building of the Columbia University Library in New York City; a national advisory committee of about one hundred and thirty prominent men in all parts of the country and in the various walks

of life has been organized; and steps have been taken to bring the enterprise before the public in the press.

The results of this preliminary work have been very gratifying: the men invited to the national advisory committee — such men as Vice President Dawes, Elihu Root, Charles E. Hughes, Herbert Hoover, William E. Borah, and William Allen White — almost unanimously gave their hearty indorsement to the project; and over thirty newspapers in all parts of the country have commended it in their editorial columns. The feeling seems to be quite general, that, as the *Indianapolis News* expressed it, the “ Association is deserving of support in its effort to broaden and deepen the channels of human understanding ”; and that, as the *New York Times* said, “ The fund sought is not large, as such things go nowadays, and certainly ought to be forthcoming.”

The plan of the campaign adopted by the general committee involves the organization of state or district committees throughout the country and some twenty-five of these are already set up or in process of organizing. These committees include not only professional members of the association but also prominent public men, and it is significant of the interest taken in the movement that Judge Hughes has accepted the chairmanship of the New York City committee. It is not expected, of course, that the sum desired can be raised from the professional members of the association, most of whom have very meager incomes, but it is hoped that they will contribute approximately fifty thousand dollars; and, if they demonstrate their faith in the association and its plans by doing this and by taking an active part in the work of the campaign, it is certain that the general public will respond liberally and that the outcome will be a great forward step for American history and history in America.

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