

THE STATE HISTORICAL CONVENTION AT MANKATO

On the morning of June 16, the day preceding the opening of the fifth state historical convention at Mankato, a party of forty-five people in eleven automobiles set off from St. Paul on the annual "historic tour" of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The first stop was at the historic town of Mendota, where the Sibley House was visited upon the invitation of the Minnesota Daughters of the American Revolution, whose state regent, Mrs. Wesley Jameson of St. Paul, cordially welcomed the party and presented a brief account of the Sibley House Association. The caretaker, Mrs. Mary E. Lang, described in interesting fashion the materials used in the building, and she distributed among the visitors copies of a pamphlet entitled *A Brief Sketch of the Sibley House: The Oldest Stone House in Minnesota*. In the pamphlet is told the story of the coming of Henry Hastings Sibley to Minnesota in 1834 and of the erection of his house, begun in 1835, an enterprise in which he "employed many hunters, trappers, and Indians, both men and women, over one hundred in all." One of the interesting features of the house is its attic. The pamphlet explains that the "outside stairway door was never locked" and that Sibley "always left it unlocked so the Indians might come in any time, day or night, and go to the attic to rest."

A stop was to have been made at Castle Rock but, owing to inclement weather, this was omitted. Shortly before reaching Northfield the party was met by Mr. Herman Roe, chairman of the Northfield committee of the Rice County Historical Society, who led the automobile procession into that city. A luncheon attended by more than one hundred people was held at the Community House in Northfield under the auspices of the Rice County Historical Society, with Mr. Roe acting as

toastmaster. After the luncheon short speeches were given by Mr. Theodore C. Blegen, acting superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society; Mr. Frederick G. Ingersoll of St. Paul, first vice president of the Minnesota Historical Society; Mr. William Ebel, who was celebrating on that very day the fiftieth anniversary of his entrance into the business life of Northfield; Dr. Donald J. Cowling, president of Carleton College; and Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the museum of the Minnesota Historical Society, who had charge of the tour from St. Paul. Mr. Blegen outlined some of the historical tendencies in Minnesota at the present time and asserted that the day is not far distant when every county in the state will have its local historical society. Mr. Ingersoll voiced the pleasure of the party in the cordial reception given it by the people of Northfield and pointed out that the historic tours organized by the state society not only tend to promote historical interest throughout the state but also contribute to the vitalizing of the state society. Mr. Ebel spoke briefly of the changes which he had observed in his fifty years of experience as a Northfield business man. Dr. Cowling emphasized the need in the world of today of history as a force that will aid civilization in keeping its balance. Present institutions and customs are deeply rooted in the past, and since this is the case the safest kind of progress is that which is most securely based upon the substantial achievements of the past. Mr. Babcock described the previous "historic tours" conducted by the state society and drew special attention to the increasing popular interest that is being shown in these excursions to different parts of the state. After these informal talks Mr. Frank E. Balmer, state leader of county agricultural agents, read an interesting and scholarly paper entitled "The Farmer and Minnesota History." This paper, which seemed peculiarly appropriate since it was presented in the heart of a rich agricultural area, is published in the present number of the magazine.

After a drive about the city of Northfield the tourists, led by Mr. Charles N. Sayles, motored to Faribault, where a local committee of the Rice County Historical Society, including Mr. Sayles, had made plans for a tour about that city and for a dinner at the Hotel Brunswick. Faribault was named for Alexander Faribault, the famous fur-trader, but as viewed by the touring party, it seemed very remote indeed from the days when the fur trade flourished. The town has become in a somewhat special sense a home for numerous educational and special state institutions. Mr. H. C. Theopold of Faribault presided at the well-attended dinner which followed the automobile trip. Among the speakers were Mr. Edgar H. Loyhed and Judge Thomas S. Buckham, who recounted in interesting fashion their recollections of early days in Faribault. Mr. Loyhed commented especially upon the need for a study of the stagecoach business. "I used to listen for the horn which meant the coach was coming with something new — not over a week old — from the nearest telegraph office," he said. "Faribault had the greatest number of stage lines in the state, and so far as I know is the only transportation center which did not become a state metropolis." Mr. Ingersoll spoke briefly on behalf of the Minnesota Historical Society. The program included also a number of charming musical selections.

From Faribault the trip was continued to Mankato. A visit had been planned to Point Pleasant at Madison Lake, where a talk was to have been given by Colonel J. M. Barclay, but owing to the lateness of the hour when Madison Lake was reached the stop was cancelled and the party proceeded to the convention city, reaching that place at about 10:30 P.M.

The Mankato convention, which opened with a session at the Masonic Temple on June 17 at 10:00 A.M., was held upon the invitation of the Chamber of Commerce, the Blue Earth County Historical Society, and members and friends of the state society in Mankato. A large and efficient committee on local arrangements, headed by Mr. W. H. Pay of Mankato,

had left no stone unturned to make the convention a successful one. The committee included Mr. C. R. Butler, Judge Lorin Cray, Miss May Fletcher, Mrs. J. S. Holbrook, Mr. Thomas Hughes, Mr. George Palmer, Mr. Dave Richards, Mr. Benjamin D. Smith, Mrs. George Sugden, Mr. Charles D. Taylor, Mr. Isaac N. Tompkins, Mr. W. D. Willard, Mrs. Theodore Williams, and Mr. C. E. Wise of Mankato; Mr. Judd Cornell, Mr. H. C. Hotaling, and Mrs. H. C. Hotaling of Mapleton; Mr. F. G. Griffin and Mrs. F. O. True of Good Thunder; Mr. J. A. Ochs and Mr. Richard Pfefferle of New Ulm; Mr. George C. Keith of Amboy; Mr. D. E. Bowen of Cambria; Mr. Fred Day of Eagle Lake; Judge J. E. Haycraft of Fairmont; Mr. L. D. Mills of Garden City; Mr. R. N. Wigley of Judson; Mr. Frank O. Swain of Lake Crystal; Mr. Oscar L. Mather of Madison Lake; Mr. H. Thielman of St. Clair; Mrs. Will Curtis of St. James; Mr. H. N. Benson of St. Peter; Mrs. Charles W. Belville of Tracy; and Mr. R. G. Champlin of Vernon Center.

At the opening session, presided over by Mr. J. L. Washburn of Duluth, Professor John P. Pritchett of Macalester College read an interesting account of the experiences of a soldier in the Sibley expedition, which will be printed in a future number of the magazine, and Mr. Thomas Hughes of Mankato presented an able paper entitled "The Historical Backgrounds of Mankato and Its Vicinity." This paper, which is brought out in full in the *Mankato Evening Herald* for June 17, opened with a survey of the earlier backgrounds of the Mankato region — its geographical situation; the Indian life as revealed in the many relics found at the Cambria village site; the Indian legends, which add a romantic touch to the story; the explorers from the time of Le Sueur down to the middle of the nineteenth century; and the fur trade and Indian treaty developments that opened the way for white settlers. After speaking of the treaty of Traverse des Sioux Mr. Hughes said, "No sooner was the treaty signed than white settlers began rushing up the Minne-

sota Valley to locate townsites and farms." The specific beginnings of Mankato's settlement Mr. Hughes related thus:

On the last day of January, 1852, three St. Paul residents started for the big bend at the mouth of the Blue Earth to found a city there. They were Henry Jackson, the first postmaster and one of the first hotel and storekeepers of the capitol city, his brother-in-law, Parsons K. Johnson and a young man named Daniel Williams.

The three hired a French Canadian teamster with his light sleigh and ponies to transport them and their luggage. Two laborers were also employed. William W. Paddock accompanied the party, to see the country. On the second day, Jackson was taken sick, and had to be driven home in his cutter by one of the hired men. The rest of the party pressed on, and reached their destination on the sixth day. On the Kasota prairie, Chief Sleepy Eyes was encamped with seventy to eighty lodges of his band, and learning the intention of the white men, he at once objected to any settlement by them on his domain until the Government had paid him therefor as stipulated by the recent treaty. The Chief was finally propitiated by the contribution of a barrel of pork and other provisions.

On February 6th, 1852, the site for the proposed new city was selected, and work on the first building started. The location made a favorable appeal, from both esthetic and utilitarian points of view. A narrow strip of rich prairie, without stone, covered with an abundant growth of tall turkey foot grass, which then, being winter, waved dead and gray in the breeze like a field of ripe grain. On one side lay the river, close and convenient for a steamboat landing, yet the bank high enough to protect from flood. On the other side lay the high wooded bluff, affording shelter from wind and storm, while from its foot gushed numerous springs of excellent water. At one end rose a vast quarry of valuable building stone ready for use with abundance of lime stone with it. At the other end was a small brook with plenty of timber for lumber and fuel.

The first building, however, was not much in beauty or utility. It was a low one story log structure about 12 feet square without window or floor. It stood on the rear of Lot 4, in Block 6 of the Townsite.

Mr. Hughes continued by tracing the development which followed these beginnings. Of special interest was his account of the Scandinavian, Welsh, German, and Scotch settlements in Blue Earth County, which had their beginnings in the fifties.

The speaker closed with a brief survey of the Sioux War in its relation to the region. In general his paper left a vivid impression of the many important and colorful developments that fill in the outlines of Mankato's historical backgrounds.

A third paper entitled "Pioneers in Southwestern Minnesota: The Story of My Grandparents," by Fern Johnson of Milaca, was read by title in the absence of the author. Her essay was recently awarded first prize in the local history contest open to Minnesota high school pupils, conducted jointly by the Minnesota Historical Society and the State Federation of Women's Clubs.

A bountiful picnic luncheon was served at Sibley State Park at 12:30 P.M. by the ladies of the local committee, with nearly 150 people present. A conference on "The Promotion of Local Historical Work in Minnesota," presided over by Judge Lorin Cray of Mankato, followed the luncheon. The first talk was to have been on "Historical Tendencies in Minnesota Today" by Mr. Blegen, but since he was unable to be present, his place was taken by Mr. Babcock, who opened the discussion. A downpour of rain, however, interrupted the conference during his talk. Mr. Babcock completed his address at the evening session and other scheduled conference talks were given at that session. One of these addresses, that by Mr. William E. Culkin, president of the St. Louis County Historical Society, was read in his absence by Mr. DeWitte N. Barber of Minneapolis. It is printed in the present number of the magazine. Mr. Arthur T. Adams of Minneapolis discussed "A Projected Survey of the Present Status of Monuments and Markers in Minnesota." Mr. Adams has recently been appointed chairman of a state-wide committee of the Minnesota Historical Society with authority to make a survey and inventory of Minnesota historic monuments and markers and it is hoped that eventually every county will have one representative on this committee. Mr. Adams indicated that the committee will conduct a wide inquiry, seeking to obtain data as to the character of the markers, their care, the accuracy of their

location, their inscriptions, their accessibility to automobiles and pedestrians, and the events commemorated. He declared that Minnesota should be in the front rank of the states that are actively engaged in historical marking, and urged the development of this work as a means toward advancing the cause of Minnesota history in general. Apart from the interest and value of such marking so far as the people of the state are concerned, he suggested that the matter can be linked up with the increasing tourist traffic in the summer months as a means of adding to the interest and pleasure of the journeyings of thousands of people through the state.

Mr. Frank O. Swain of Lake Crystal considered the problem of "How a Local Museum Can Serve a Community." He declared that the proper place for the community museum is on the main thoroughfare of the town, and that the window displays must be of such a nature as to invite the hurrying public to stop and investigate; thus the benefit to be acquired from the museum will be measured by the capacity of the people to absorb benefit and by the time they can give to examining it. Originally museum meant the home of the Muses. Today an historical museum is a place of display for objects of the past, "a storehouse of valuable information," and its use should appeal to students, writers, public speakers, advertisers, and others. Mr. Swain suggested that the community museum might adopt a wide collecting policy — gathering newspapers, manuscripts, records of conventions and meetings, addresses, old letters, diaries, biographies, photographs, Indian and war objects, weapons, tools and all objects and materials that throw light upon the long historical development from the days of the Indian down to the present. He asserted that museums can be closely related to the public schools and to the community library. He set up as the objective "the serving of the community" and asserted "that the people in all of the communities of the state are ready to support community museums." "But a collection is not a museum," he asserted, "and much depends on selection, classification, man-

ner of display and frequent changing of exhibits." He called special attention to Blue Earth County, which "has been favored by Providence in its gifts of Indian village sites, mounds, trails and an interesting and varied history since the white occupation was established."

A talk by Mrs. Jameson on "The Work of the Daughters of the American Revolution in the Field of Markers and Monuments" was omitted owing to her unavoidable absence from the Mankato meeting.

An interesting feature of the afternoon program was an automobile tour to Lake Crystal where a remarkable historical exhibit, organized under the leadership of Mr. Frank O. Swain, was displayed in the windows of the various shops. The *Lake Crystal Tribune* for June 17 devotes an entire page to a list of the articles exhibited, and asserts that the exhibit, first planned as a courtesy to the visitors, "has grown with such rapidity that it appears to justify being made an annual event." The *Tribune* believes that a vast number of historical objects will be turned over to the city of Lake Crystal "as soon as a suitable place is provided for their safekeeping." The Lake Crystal exhibit was a practical illustration of the ideas presented by Mr. Swain before the convention. Among the hundreds of objects viewed in the Lake Crystal store windows were such items as ox yokes, Indian pipes, tomahawks, war clubs, arrow points, grinding stones, Indian implements of all kinds, old chairs, guns, copies of old newspapers, spinning wheels, domestic articles from a Welsh settlement, old candlesticks, books, a carpet bag, blankets, currency, vases, a log chain, old pictures, and the like. Merely to list the items suggests the variety of the exhibit. The Lake Crystal visit added an element of very great interest to the convention program.

A second interesting event of the afternoon was a program arranged by the Anthony Wayne chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution at the approximate site of Fort L'Huillier. Here a tablet marking the site was unveiled, bearing the following inscription: "Sept. 30, 1700-June 17, 1926

Near this spot stood Fort Le Hillier (*L'Huilier*). This fort was erected by Pierre Charles Le Sueur, who with twenty-seven men here spent the winter of 1700. Placed by Anthony Wayne Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution." In connection with this event, Mrs. L. C. Jefferson, past state regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution, spoke briefly on the work of that organization in the marking and preservation of historic sites.

The last session of the convention was held at the Masonic Temple at 7:30 P.M. with Mr. G. M. Palmer of Mankato as the presiding officer. The first part of the session was devoted to the completion of the conference on the promotion of local historical work. Thereupon followed the presentation of a paper entitled "Southern Minnesota: How Manuscripts Tell Its Story," by Dr. Grace L. Nute, curator of manuscripts for the Minnesota Historical Society. Drawing upon unprinted manuscripts in the possession of the historical society, Dr. Nute gave a succession of vivid pictures of early conditions in the southern Minnesota region and at the same time illustrated the importance of finding and preserving such historical materials. Her paper will be printed in a later number of the magazine. The paper of Dr. William W. Folwell, president of the Minnesota Historical Society and president emeritus of the University of Minnesota, which was scheduled as the main number of the last session of the convention, was entitled "Progress and Politics: A View of Minnesota in the Early Seventies." No abstract of it need be given here since it was based upon a chapter in the third volume of his *History of Minnesota*, which is expected from the press in the near future. The final number of the session was an illustrated lecture by Mr. Babcock entitled "A Pictorial History of the Sióux Land." Drawing upon the rare treasures of the museum and the library of the Minnesota Historical Society, Mr. Babcock had had a series of unusual slides made, illustrating the development of the general region of southern Minnesota from the days of the early French explorers down through the period of the Sioux

Outbreak and the Civil War. Mr. Babcock recounted the history of the region beginning with Father Hennepin and Michel Accault, and touching on such important later figures as Jonathan Carver, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike, Jean Baptiste Faribault, Ramsay Crooks, Joe Rolette, Major Stephen H. Long, Joseph N. Nicollet, and Henry H. Sibley. Special attention was given to the important series of Indian treaties, including those of Prairie du Chien in 1825, Washington in 1837, Traverse des Sioux and Mendota in 1851, and to the early population growth. After giving a pictorial review of the period of the Sioux and Civil wars, the speaker discussed the development of transportation, and spoke especially of the famous "Steam Wagon" invention of Joseph R. Brown. "The close of the Indian troubles brought opportunities for a tremendous development in every line of activity, and the railroad builders were among the first to take advantage of it," Mr. Babcock asserted. "Lines were projected in all directions, and, one ingenious inventor, Joseph R. Brown, even constructed a 'Steam Wagon' or tractor, which was to pull trains of loaded wagons across the prairie. 'Joe Brown's Steam Wagon' was fifty years too early, but the very fact that such an invention was made at that time, 1870, shows the vision of the future which the founders of Minnesota possessed."

Before the end of the session, appropriate resolutions drawn up by a committee consisting of Mrs. L. C. Jefferson, Miss Elsa R. Nordin, and Mr. Arthur T. Adams were adopted, expressing appreciation and gratitude to all those who had contributed by their courtesies to the success of both the tour and the convention. Special mention was made of the Rice County Historical Society, as represented by both Faribault and Northfield people, the Mankato Chamber of Commerce, the Blue Earth County Historical Society and its president, Judge Lorin Cray, the committee on local arrangements and its chairman, Mr. W. H. Pay, the ladies of the Blue Earth County Historical Society and the Anthony Wayne chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Masonic

Lodge, the citizens of Lake Crystal, and especially Mr. Frank O. Swain and the editor of the *Lake Crystal Tribune*.

The convention was a marked success. Large numbers of people were brought together for the various meetings; much interest and even enthusiasm found expression; the merit of the papers, addresses, and special exhibits set a high standard; state-wide newspaper publicity carried the story of the convention to all parts of Minnesota. It is not to be doubted that the summer meetings of the Minnesota Historical Society are on a firm footing. The success of the five conventions culminating in the recent Mankato meeting assures the continuance of the custom. Already an invitation has been received to hold the next summer meeting in the city of Faribault, and several other sections of the state are interested in the prospect of concentrating state attention upon their historical backgrounds through the holding of such conventions.



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