

THE STATE HISTORICAL CONVENTION AT HUTCHINSON

Several circumstances conspired to make the eighth state historical convention, held at Hutchinson and neighboring places on June 14 and 15, notably successful. The general committee, with Mr. Frederick G. Ingersoll, president of the Minnesota Historical Society, as chairman, and Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of the society's museum, as secretary, planned the tour and the sessions with meticulous care, and their efforts were efficiently seconded by local committees at Hutchinson, Glencoe, Litchfield, Henderson, Silver Lake, and Forest City, of which Mr. Sam G. Anderson of Hutchinson was the coördinating chairman. Summer historical excursions from St. Paul to various parts of the state have appealed to the imagination and interest of increasing numbers of people since the inauguration of the custom seven years ago. And the press has demonstrated its awareness of the dramatic element in such exploitation of Minnesota's past. Thus among the excursionists whose cavalcade of twenty cars and one chartered bus set off for Henderson by way of Shakopee on the fair morning of June 14 were three writers representing Minneapolis and St. Paul newspapers.

A group of about 150 people greeted the historical tourists when they arrived at Henderson. Here on the courthouse grounds, where stands a monument to John Other Day, the noted "good Indian" hero of the Sioux War, the first session of the convention was held. The speaker, Mr. Verne E. Chatelain, acting assistant superintendent of the historical society, had selected the peculiarly appropriate theme of "Joseph Renshaw Brown, Pioneer," — appropriate because, as Mr. Chatelain explained, Henderson was "the child of Brown's brain." Here in 1856 Brown began publication of

the *Henderson Democrat* and here, during his three years of residence, Brown dreamed many of his bright-colored dreams for the future of the village and of the Northwest. Mr. Chatelain reviewed the career of this unusual Minnesota figure, whose "life was packed to the brim with a bewildering series of adventures." He was a gifted son of the frontier, with the "ability to do a large variety of tasks with the polish and technique of the expert." The speaker enumerated nearly a dozen "historical firsts" credit for which should go to Brown, beginning with his place as the first drummer boy of Fort Snelling and including his claim to the honor of being the first man to run a steam locomotive in the Minnesota Valley. He was characterized as the leading parliamentarian on the frontier in his time, whose legal services, albeit he was no lawyer, were greatly in demand. His outstanding distinction, however, was his knowledge of Indian affairs; the speaker emphasized the importance of his inauguration of reforms in Indian administration after his appointment as Indian agent in 1857, an office that, unfortunately, he lost in consequence of the spoils system. A monument to Brown was erected several years ago by the club women of Henderson; the town boasts one of somewhat earlier vintage, however,—his old home, erected before the Civil War, to which a visit was made after Mr. Chatelain had concluded the reading of his paper. Another early building of Henderson is the old American House, put up in 1853, when the town was the chief center west of Minneapolis and St. Paul. This survival from the ante-bellum period of Henderson history was also viewed by the tourists before their departure for Glencoe by way of Gaylord and New Auburn.

The session at Glencoe followed a luncheon in the community building attended by about 150 people. After a song by Mrs. Frank Reimer and an address of welcome by the presiding officer, Mr. Jay J. Greaves of Glencoe, Professor Charles J. Ritchey of Macalester College read a paper entitled

“Martin McLeod and the Development of the Minnesota Valley.” McLeod’s introduction to Minnesota occurred in 1837, when the abortive Dickson filibustering expedition broke up and several of its members attempted the journey from Pembina to Fort Snelling. In March of that year McLeod, with Pierre Bottineau, the famous guide, battled his way against a blizzard to the American Fur Company post at Lake Traverse, then in charge of Joseph R. Brown. “While at Lake Traverse and on the trip down the Minnesota River,” said Professor Ritchey, “McLeod met other men with whom he was to be intimately associated as fur-trader, land speculator, and legislator: Joseph Renville, Dr. Williamson, and Gideon H. Pond at Lac qui Parle, Louis Provençalle at Traverse des Sioux, Jean Baptiste Faribault at the Little Rapids of the Minnesota River, and Henry H. Sibley and others at Mendota.” The speaker gave his attention mainly to the period from about 1840 to 1855, when McLeod was a prominent fur-trader, with Lac qui Parle as his chief post. McLeod had many other irons in the fire, however. Among other things, he was a city planner: in the late thirties, for example, he and an army officer made plans for the town of “St. Peter” to be built up at the east end of the Seventh Street bridge at Fort Snelling as soon as the military reserve should be cut down. “A sketch of the town was to be lithographed at St. Louis, town lots were to be advertised, and a hotel was to be built,” said Professor Ritchey. “Was this the first town plan in Minnesota?” In 1855 McLeod figured as “one of a small group that laid out the plans for Glencoe” in the county named in his honor upon its establishment a year later. In referring to the political career of McLeod, which was limited to four terms in the territorial council and membership in the constitutional convention of 1857, Professor Ritchey said that though he was not a great leader, he did not lack vision and imagination. In proof of this characterization the speaker added, “He was responsible for the changing of the name ‘St. Peter’s River’ to

the 'Minnesota River'; substituted the name 'Hennepin County' for 'Snelling County'; asked that the university be located at St. Anthony; drafted the first education bill; strove with others to secure the location of the state agricultural college at Glencoe; and planned to establish Hamline University there also."

"Adventures of a Newspaper Man in Search of Local History Material" was the title of the next paper, read by Mr. Win V. Working of Blakeley, who said that in recent years he had written hundreds of pioneer stories for Minnesota papers. His experience had impressed him with the difficulty of ascertaining historical truth, especially in reconciling conflicting accounts of events. "I do not believe that any accurate and complete history of the Sioux Outbreak is in existence today," he said, "and certainly there is no complete and composite record that presents a true picture of pioneer life in McLeod County and adjacent areas." Mr. Working had discovered, however, that bits of information gathered here and there — items from old pioneers, newspapers, old letters, and other kinds of documents — often do fit together, like parts of a picture puzzle, and aid one in reconstructing the true sequence of past events. He gave a number of interesting illustrations of historical finds and incidentally made clear the fascination of the search for local historical records. Among numerous items to which he referred was an account book kept by a pioneer storekeeper near Glencoe. A very moist account from 1857 was cited: "2 quarts of whiskey, \$.50; 2 quarts whiskey, \$.50; 1 quart ditto, \$.25; 1 broom, \$.30; 1 quart molasses, \$.35; 1 quart whiskey, \$.25; 1 quart ditto, \$.25; 1 pint ditto, \$.15; 1¼ gallons whiskey, \$1.50; 1 quart ditto, \$.25; 1 quart ditto, \$.25."

A conference on the organization of local history work — a feature never omitted from the programs of the summer conventions — formed the concluding part of the Glencoe session. Such conferences are intended to be practical and this

one centered about a specific question: "Is McLeod County Interested in the Formation of a County Historical Society?" Opening the discussion, Dr. Solon J. Buck, superintendent of the state society, spoke of the objectives of a county historical society and pointed out that since the characteristics of a community are determined by its past, intelligent people, desiring to understand the present and to plan wisely for the future, find a knowledge of the past imperative. He spoke also of the commercial advantage that attention to local history may secure for a community through the attraction of tourists. In urging the organization of local historical societies, he said that they should include "not only the old settlers, but also the vigorous and active men and women who appreciate the civic, cultural, and practical values of the cultivation of community memory." Local history organization has progressed rapidly in Minnesota in recent years. Though it is only seven years since the St. Louis County Historical Society, the first of the crop of societies of this kind in the state, was organized, the speaker said that there are now "some seventeen county historical societies in the state, scattered from Roseau to Martin County; others are in process of formation; in five or six counties local historical work of value is being done through museums connected with high schools or libraries; and occasionally, as in Kandiyohi and Meeker counties, old settlers associations are functioning to some extent as historical societies." He closed by emphasizing three requisites for successful local history work: one person willing to shoulder the responsibility of keeping the work going; a continuous program of constructive work; and coöperation with the state society.

Mrs. Sophie P. White of Hutchinson sounded a note of warning against mere formality in connection with historical activity, that is, against organization followed by inactivity. She suggested that the various communities should start real work without delay, probe into many aspects of their begin-

nings and their history, and ultimately federate in a county organization. Mr. L. C. Simon of St. Paul then spoke briefly, emphasizing the stimulation of love of locality and state through the promotion of historical understanding. The chairman, Mr. Greaves, called attention to the pioneer interest in public affairs, a subject fruitful, he thought, both for study and emulation. Mr. Spurgeon S. Beach of Hutchinson considered the time ripe for the organization of a county society. The local society in Hutchinson, long moribund, had been revived some two months ago, he said, and now had sixty-three members.¹ The thing needed in local history organization, he added, was initiative, "some one to start it off." On this philosophic note the conference came to a close.

The tour was continued to Hutchinson by way of Brownton, where a brief inspection was made of the site of a Sioux War stockade and the scene of an atrocity of the uprising. At Hutchinson a session was held in the evening at the city hall, with an address of welcome by Mayor H. A. Dobratz as the initial number on the program. In the course of his remarks he mentioned some of the local episodes of the Sioux War, an historical event naturally occupying a large place in the historical consciousness of the people of the Hutchinson region, and he called special attention to a marker erected in 1905 on the site of the stockade built in 1862 when the Sioux were on the warpath. Here Little Crow's warriors attacked and were repulsed on September 4 of that year. The principal address of the convention was then delivered, on the subject "When America Was the Land of Canaan," by Dr. George M. Stephenson, associate professor of history at the University of Minnesota. This interesting historical study, which is published in full in the present number of MINNESOTA HISTORY, is based upon materials collected by Dr. Stephenson in 1927 and 1928 in Sweden, while engaged in studying

¹ The *Hutchinson Leader* announced on May 3 that this society had collected a fund of \$171 for the erection of historic markers.

the backgrounds of Swedish immigration to the United States as a fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation of New York. Dr. Stephenson's paper ended the formal program for the day, but many visitors found time after the session to examine a series of special historical exhibits on display in Hutchinson store windows. These exhibits were rather unusual in that they included, besides the ordinary museum pieces — costumes, old weapons, hand-spun and woven linens, and the like — a good deal of manuscript material and some old newspapers.

The second and final day of the convention, June 15, was crowded with tours and sessions, beginning with an automobile procession, with thirty-six cars in line, from Hutchinson to Forest City. Before leaving Hutchinson a stop was made at the Pendergast School and Mr. H. L. Merrill told of the burning of the old school by the Indians in 1862, an event commemorated by a marker recently erected by the Hutchinson Historical Society. As the journey to Forest City was continued, numerous historical markers and monuments were observed, including one in Ellsworth Township, Meeker County, indicating the spot where Little Crow was killed on July 3, 1863. Mr. F. M. March of Litchfield presented interesting facts about this and other sites examined in the vicinity. Stops were made at several places noteworthy as scenes of occurrences of the Sioux War, at some of which temporary markers had been put up. The victims of the Acton murders, which precipitated the Sioux War, are buried in the Ness Cemetery, where a stop was made to view a monument erected by the state in 1878. Farther on the Acton monument, put up by the state in 1909, was viewed. Mr. A. H. DeLong of Litchfield, who served as a scout in 1862, gave a brief account of the bloody events thus commemorated. The last stop of the morning was at Forest City, where a marker has been erected on the site of a Sioux War stockade. Here Mrs. Peter Rodange, regent of the Mollie Stark Branham chapter

of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Litchfield and the daughter of a settler who served as a scout in the Sioux War, read a paper on "Settlers and Sioux: The Story of the Acton-Forest City Battle." The march of a detachment under Captain Richard Strout from Minneapolis to Glencoe and back to Acton, the retreat of a group of settlers under Captain George C. Whitcomb to Forest City, the story of the wild night ride of three men from Forest City to warn Strout of the imminence of an Indian attack, the "battle of Acton," ending with the withdrawal of Strout's force to Hutchinson — these were among the subjects that Mrs. Rodange embodied in her spirited paper. Several survivors of the old Forest City stockade were introduced to the audience after the conclusion of Mrs. Rodange's account.

The tour was then continued to Litchfield, where at the Lenhardt Hotel the visitors were presented with flowers by members of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and at about 1:00 P.M. a complimentary luncheon, lavish enough to be called a dinner, was served by the people of the city. The afternoon session, held in the local Opera House, was opened by a cordial address of welcome by Mayor Determan, after which Mrs. Frank E. Lawrence of Greenleaf sang two songs. The presiding officer, Mr. F. M. March of Litchfield, echoing the welcome of the mayor, expressed the hope that the convention would leave lasting influences in the community. It had already led the people of the town to erect several temporary markers; it meant, he believed, the beginning of a deeper interest in Minnesota history. Before the formal papers of the session were read there was a brief discussion of the problem of local history organization, led by the convention manager, Mr. Babcock. He sketched the recent growth of local historical interest in Minnesota, told of the society's series of summer tours and conventions, and closed by expressing the hope that Meeker County, which already has an actively functioning pioneer

society, would take up vigorously the work of marking sites and collecting and preserving historical materials. Mr. Charles Stees of St. Paul, a member of the state society's executive council, then expressed the society's appreciation of the cordiality with which the people of Litchfield had entertained the convention and urged them to enlist the active participation of the younger generation in local historical work. Mr. March, responding, asserted that there was a keen local realization of the need of collecting historical materials before the pioneer generation had entirely disappeared and predicted a sustained local interest. "The next time you come here," he said, "you will find bronze markers in place of the temporary wooden ones that we have erected."

The first regular paper of the session was a sketch of "The Early History of Meeker County" by Mr. H. I. Peterson, editor of the *Litchfield Independent*. He told of the coming of settlers in 1855 in two groups, one consisting of three men who poled and paddled up the north fork of the Crow River to the open prairie a short distance west of the site of the present village of Forest City, where they wintered; the other, of two men who came up from the south, probably over the Henderson trail, and took claims on the north shore of Cedar Lake. One of the latter, Dr. Frederick N. Ripley, lost his life the next spring in a terrible blizzard and was buried beside the lake that bears his name. In 1856 settlers began to pour into the region; the county was organized under an act of that year; and Forest City was selected as the county seat, an honor it had to relinquish to Litchfield twelve years later. "The first settlers," said Mr. Peterson, "were made up partly of Yankees from the eastern states, some Kentuckians and Virginians who located in the timber, Irish from Pennsylvania and Illinois, Norwegians from Wisconsin, with some Germans, Canadians, and Swedes." The speaker touched on the effect of the panic of 1857, told of the United States land office established at Forest City in 1858, and alluded to the

scare that followed the uprising of the Sioux, which, he said, "drove more than half the inhabitants from the county. Live stock, homes, and household goods were abandoned by a great many families, and some never came back." Not until 1866 was the land office reestablished; it was then placed, not at Forest City, but in Greenleaf, where it remained until its removal three years later to Litchfield.

"The Big Woods Country" — "land of mystery, shadows, and winding trails that had no ending" — was the theme of the last paper of the session, given by Mr. Arthur J. Larsen, newspaper assistant of the Minnesota Historical Society. After defining the geographical extent of the area and telling of the Nicollet exploring expedition, Mr. Larsen called attention to the "quietness and rapidity" with which the Big Woods area was developed: "In 1849 the country was almost unknown. In 1851 the 'Suland' was purchased from the Indians. In 1852 some steps toward settlement had already been taken. By 1855 the country was fast losing the characteristics of a frontier." After speaking of the panic of 1857 and the second panic five years later, Mr. Larsen said of the pioneers who had the grit to "start over" again: "Theirs was the legacy of the Big Woods, which had withstood time and storm and the careless savages for centuries to go down before the new order and make for Minnesota one of her garden spots — on the stumps of the Big Woods." After this paper had been read, the presiding officer told of a number of historical sites in the county that had not been included in the day's sight-seeing. The session was then adjourned and the visitors, before returning to Hutchinson, were given an opportunity to examine an interesting display of historical objects in the Litchfield public library.

The final session, held that evening in the Masonic Temple at Hutchinson, was preceded by a banquet, after which a group of songs was sung by Mr. Oliver D. Hutchinson of Minneapolis. "A Few Remembrances of Hutchinson" was the title

of the first paper of the session, presented by Mr. H. L. Merrill, former superintendent of the local schools.² The town was founded by New Englanders as a result of the decision of three brothers, Asa, John, and Judson Hutchinson, to go on a concert trip to the West. Their original purpose was to sing their way to Kansas and there found a town that would be a center for antislavery sentiment, but they were diverted from this purpose by reports received at Milwaukee from W. W. Pendergast, like them a native of New Hampshire, who had just returned from a trip to Minnesota and strongly advised them to found their town in that territory. They went north and on November 16, 1855, a party of ten men, including the musical trio, left Minneapolis to examine the country west of the Big Woods and specifically to select the site of Hutchinson. This purpose accomplished, a town-site company was formed, officers were chosen, and a committee was appointed to draw up papers of incorporation. After relating these beginnings Mr. Merrill gave accounts of the survey of the site, the building of a road from Watertown to Hutchinson, the beginnings of settlement in 1856, the coming of Germans in 1857, and numerous other aspects of the history of the community before the Sioux War.

The last paper of the convention was on "Early Steamboating on the Minnesota River" by Mr. William J Petersen of the University of Iowa, whose article on "The 'Virginia,' the 'Clermont' of the Upper Mississippi" was published in the December, 1928, issue of MINNESOTA HISTORY. The earliest Minnesota River steamboat trip chronicled is that of the "Rufus Putnam" in 1825, according to Mr. Petersen. It

² This paper is published in full in the *Hutchinson Leader* for June 28. It should be noted that as a part of its preliminary convention publicity the *Leader* brought out three articles in its issue for April 26 on steamboat navigation on the Minnesota River in the fifties, the activities of a McLeod County immigration committee appointed in 1867 to encourage settlement, and the coming of the first settler to Acoma Township.

carried supplies for the Columbia Fur Company at Land's End, above Fort Snelling. In 1836 the "Palmyra," with a party of excursionists, poked its nose up the Minnesota three miles. Excursions in 1850 by the "Anthony Wayne," the "Nominee," and the "Yankee" did much to arouse the interest of American land-seekers in Minnesota. The longest trip of that year was made by the "Yankee," which reached a point a few miles above Judson in Blue Earth County. After thus sketching its beginnings, Mr. Petersen discussed the development of the traffic and its importance in the economic history of Minnesota. His paper will be published in full in a later number of this magazine.

Before the convention adjourned Dr. Buck complimented the people of Hutchinson on the valuable collection of historical objects put on display for the convention and suggested that they should be brought together in a permanent local museum. It is understood that Mrs. White has since compiled a complete list of the objects in the exhibition. Mr. Sam G. Anderson, chairman of the local committees, followed Dr. Buck, speaking impromptu of some aspects of the transportation history of Hutchinson.

During the session the committee on resolutions, consisting of Mrs. Winifred Murray Milne of St. Paul, Mr. P. P. Quist of Minneapolis, and Mr. Chatelain, presented the following resolutions, which were unanimously adopted:

WHEREAS, The eighth annual convention of the Minnesota Historical Society is now about to adjourn after a delightful tour through the counties of Carver, Sibley, McLeod, and Meeker, a part of the Big Woods country of Minnesota, visiting points of unusual interest in the history of early settlement, town-site speculation, transportation, and the Sioux War; and

WHEREAS, The good people of this region, individually and through their district committees on arrangements, more especially the splendid group at Hutchinson, hosts to this convention, and the efficient American Legion post at Henderson, as well as the tireless committees at Glencoe, Brownton, Litchfield, Acton, Forest City, and elsewhere, have contributed through their efforts, hospi-

tality, money, and time to make this convention one of extreme value and pleasure; and

WHEREAS, Those who have expended much labor in preparing the excellent papers and talks that have been presented to this body and the general state-wide committee through its chairman, Mr. Ingersoll, and its genial secretary, Mr. Babcock, who has also served as general manager of the convention and tour, have all performed their important and varied tasks with signal distinction;

BE IT RESOLVED by the Minnesota Historical Society, its members and friends in convention assembled, that we extend our heartiest congratulations to those who have made possible all these enjoyable and noteworthy contributions and that we express our sincere appreciation of the numerous courtesies and services extended to us.



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