

MINNESOTA HISTORY

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 18

MARCH, 1937

NUMBER 1

HISTORY FOR A DEMOCRACY¹

I shall open my remarks by paraphrasing a well-known saying: "I care not who makes the laws for a country if I can write its history." For history nourishes the spirit of any institution. Without a conception of relationship with its past, any group will lack a living sense of its unity and value. A feeling that our present activity has some meaning in the scheme of time gives a sense of continuity to our participation or membership in any society. To lead a people into the future, teach them about their past, and they will know — or think they know — whither you are leading them and whither they are going.

This can be illustrated in the life of Christendom during those ages in which its thought was dominated by the church. The Christian religion was emphatically a religion which placed man in a historic setting, a setting that reached back to Adam and forward to the millenium. It gave to every moment of the Christian life a meaning within the terms of this stupendous sequence. The history that the church taught was a history of mankind, and the future that it set before man was a future for the whole race.

The next great institution to be nourished by history was the nation. Every nationality in Europe was brought to a consciousness of its own inner unity by learning of its past. When Palacky undertook to revive the national spirit of the Bohemians, he began by writing the history of Bohemia. The national histories differed from that which the church

¹ Presented on January 18, 1937, as the annual address of the eighty-eighth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society. *Ed.*

had taught in that each of them applied to a particular people and gave to that people a sense of its own separateness from all other peoples. The history that accompanied the culture of Christendom was a history of mankind; the history that accompanied the rise of nations was, in fact, a number of separate histories, one for each nation.

More recently there has arisen another international history to nourish the spirit of another culture. This is Communist history, which recasts the story of mankind in terms of the conflict of classes. A friend of mine in Russia heard this anecdote of a university entrance examination. A girl taking the examination was asked in what respect the reign of terror in the French Revolution differed from the reign of terror in the Russian Revolution. She replied that she could see no difference. She was then told she could not enter the university. She managed to get another chance at the examination, and again she was asked what the difference was between the French and Russian reigns of terror. This time she replied that the French reign of terror was enacted on behalf of the bourgeoisie; the Russian, on behalf of the proletariat. She passed the examination. The Communist political system includes as an essential part an orthodox interpretation of history.

Now the world is confronted with a further development of the national type of history in the form of the new Fascist and Nazi mythologies. The officially approved versions of history within these national cults reach back to the most remote periods of time and down to the most recent past with a rigidly orthodox interpretation of every part of the sequence. In the Fascist conception of history there is complete continuity between the Roman Empire and modern Italy; the Mediterranean is still *mare nostrum*. There is a special Fascist interpretation of the World War—it was won for all the Allies by Italy in Venetia. So also the authentic Nazi history includes an interpretation of the role of the Germanic element in European culture, of the causes

of the World War and of Germany's defeat, and of the burning of the Reichstag building. The historian is not permitted to doubt, to question, or to criticize any of these official interpretations. The Fascist cultures, however rugged they may be in some aspects, are delicate in respect to their historical digestions. Only the most carefully prepared history, put together according to prescription, will nourish them.

Having noted that there are different histories for different political and social situations, we may now ask, "What is the history for us?" What should be the history for a federal democracy such as ours; what is the history that nourishes the spirit of our own institutions? Can we also set up our history on the basis of myths appropriate to ourselves? I think there has been a tendency to make heroes out of democrats and democrats out of heroes, and to select for special emphasis and praise in history those states that were democracies—to seek to find in history democracy as a common denominator of value.

More specifically, it was Plutarch with his stories of Greek democracies who furnished historical material for the great democrats of the French Revolution. Throughout the nineteenth century a Whig interpretation of English history inspired the popular movement in Europe, and such historians as Freeman and Stubbs tried to carry the conception of freedom, equality, and popular rule into the remote background of early German tribal life.

Now it is the weakness of this kind of history—whether it be written for the church, the nation, the Communist society, the Fascist state, or even the federal democracy itself—that it stands at the mercy of objective criticism. The faithful following of the technique of historical investigation may at any time overturn elements of the story that stand as essentials in the use that is being made of it. Objective investigation may prove that the world was not created in 4004 B.C.; that the most important develop-

ments on the European scene were not the special experience of any one nation, but were shared in common by many peoples; and that the continuity alleged to be found in the life of a nation from the remote past to the present day is illusory or incidental. The Communist interpretation of social evolution and political events may not be sustainable in the light of an objective criticism of the evidence, and the Fascist or Nazi interpretations may also go to pieces under criticism. Nor is the historical interpretation which has nourished the spirit of democracy immune. The bold conceptions of Freeman and Stubbs on early German democracy have already been relegated to the junk heap of discarded historical syntheses.

If we undertake deliberately to nourish our own institutions on a history of this kind, made to order for this purpose, we may find ourselves confronted with the tragic dilemma that the mission of our history cannot be served without abandoning the scientific historical method itself. And this would be particularly fatal to democracy, because democracy more than any other kind of government needs to sustain free investigation and criticism of everything. A myth that will not stand criticism must ultimately be protected by force. And an interpretation of history that one is not permitted to doubt and criticize becomes *ipso facto* an interpretation that one cannot sustain and prove. A history that will nourish the spirit of democracy must be one that leaves its investigators free to follow wherever the evidence leads them, whatever may be their conclusions regarding men, events, and institutions. Even if it should be discovered that the heroes of democracy were villains, and that the institutions of democracy did not function as the well-wishers of democracy would have preferred—even then, the historian must be free to reach and publish his conclusions. I think that if we are willing to analyze somewhat comprehensively the essential values of our democracy, we can mark out a field of history that will sustain

those values, even while it conserves the essentials of historical method.

I shall take three elements of our own national culture and treat them as essentials which it should be the purpose of history to nourish and sustain. First, I shall place the element of respect for the value of the individual personality and the protection for him of a maximum zone of freedom. This conception is opposed to dictatorships of all kinds. Carried to an extreme this may become a kind of anarchy; kept within limits, it preserves in a society a richness and a variety that no other system can develop. This valuing of individual freedom must be tempered and balanced by recognition of social needs.

The second element of our system is its federative structure. Not the individual person alone but groups of all kinds, organized in all ways, are recognized by our society and given their zone of creative activity. This conception is directly opposed to the ideal of the totalitarian state. Here also it is necessary to think in terms of a balance to be maintained between the larger societies and the smaller; between the nation, the state, and the locality. But I think it is inevitable that the protection of the individual in his own freedom is inseparable from this federative organization of society, for in a great centralized state, democracy may become indistinguishable from dictatorship.

This brings me to the third of our fundamental conceptions—the ideal of government by the people. I think that this implies not only a federative organization which leaves local affairs to localities, even as it places national affairs in the hands of the whole nation; it means also that the people in ruling themselves must act with a keen respect for facts, for knowledge, for enlightenment. They must be willing to get together on the common platform of discovered truth, wherever that platform may be.

Let us then raise the question of what kind of history will preserve these three values of democracy as I have defined

them, and my answer falls into three parts. The kind of history that will preserve our respect for individual freedom is a history of ourselves, a history of individuals—it is family history. The kind of history that will preserve the federative structure of our society is the history of our homes, of our communities—it is local history. The kind of history that will preserve the basis of government by ourselves is history written by ourselves. It is history in the study and writing of which we all participate. Those who write the laws should also write the history. Participation in government on the basis of respect for truth and understanding of the methods by which it is investigated implies participation in scholarship. Family history to nourish individualism; local history to nourish federalism; and participation of all the people in the investigation of their past to nourish the sense of their participation in determining their future—this is the triple program I wish to present.

First let me speak of the history of the self. Each of us comes into existence as a unique organism; none of us is exactly like any other. And unless we appreciate the value of that uniqueness which is in each of us, we have not caught the meaning of individual freedom. It is precisely because none of us are exactly alike that each of us must be permitted to develop himself in his own way. Just as the history of a nation stimulates the sense of nationality, so the history of a person should stimulate the sense of personality.

At the most specific level this kind of history is the diary. With what pleasure and profit any of us will read a diary of one of our grandparents! Are we leaving similar documents for our grandchildren? It is an interesting fact that the Puritans, with their keen sense of personal responsibility toward God, were great keepers of diaries.

As a projection or expansion of this history of the self,

the next step is the history of the family. A program of history writing which would fulfill completely the task that is here implied is something that staggers the imagination. It is no less than the demand that every family in the country possess its own history. This kind of history is not to be conceived as mere genealogy. We have seen much of that kind of research which labors only to discover among our ancestors persons of distinction, or which tries only to trace back lists of names. I am not thinking of mere lists of names and dates, but of a history that will give each individual a knowledge of the whole complex of biological, cultural, and economic events that have made him what he is, and set him in his relation to the universe. For there is, in truth, a history of the world that stems out from each of us, and for no two of us is this history of the world precisely the same.

Through what family ties is each of us brought into relation with the great past of our whole race? In the family history of my seven-year-old son there is, to begin with, the last phase of the westward movement: pioneering in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon; migration into California. Back of that is a Pennsylvania ironmaster of the pre-Carnegie days; slaveowners in Virginia and Georgia; and a Pennsylvania Dutch peasantry with its hard religion and tight-fisted prosperity. The Civil War, in my son's family history, stands as a family affair in that a southern girl had married a Yankee. The world of European imperialism enters his picture through relatives who were missionaries. Religious conflict in the Rhineland and in Ulster is a part of the more remote background. My son has practically no distinguished ancestors, so far as I know, but his family in the last two centuries has touched scores of major moving forces in the modern world, and they have in a sense become a part of him. This is true of everyone living today.

If nations can build up a national consciousness by selecting from the stream of history those events in which the

continuity of a national life is manifested and the place of a nation in its relation to the world is illustrated, does not the same rule apply to the individual?

It may be objected that such personal and family histories, making of each of us a separate focal point of world history, would constitute in each case an arbitrary *mélange*. But this is no more true of individual than of national histories. They too are highly arbitrary. In times past, histories of nations were written as the histories of wars and kings; the histories of kings were indeed family histories, and wars were state enterprises, easily identified with the states that made them. But social, economic, and intellectual histories must be forced and mangled in order to compress them into national compartments. Paris has more in common with Berlin than with any village in Provence or Normandy. Technology, transportation, and science, and even the major movements of social policy, develop in areas that overlap frontiers of national states. National history as it is written today is just as arbitrary in its selection of facts as the personal and family history I have outlined. Moreover, a family history possesses a continuity so basic, so biological, that it might properly be taken for granted as the surest and most secure pattern in which to state the relations of the past to the present. Historians may dispute endlessly about the periodization of history; they may ask, "When did the Middle Ages end?" "When did the nineteenth century begin?" But the units of family history present no such difficulty. They begin each with a birth and end with a death, and taken together they strike a rhythm of periodization that is the same throughout history — the rhythm of the generations of man.

I believe, moreover, that the development of family history has certain practical aspects which cannot be ignored. It is in a sense the spiritual correlate of the institute of the family and the material system of private property. Private property at the material level gives to the individual

a sense of significance and a range of action; and, through the institution of inheritance within a family, a contact with the past and with the future. In our day this material institution has perhaps lacked in spiritual nourishment. In an age of science we have no household gods, and a Christian culture cannot sustain an ancestral cult. Perhaps family history will nourish for us the values and the traditions that the household gods or the ancestral cult nourished in other cultures.

Now I come to the second branch of history which I conceive to be a cultural necessity in a federal democracy, and this is the history of the community. Just as the history of the self has as its primitive document the diary, so the history of the home has as its principal document the abstract of title of the house we happen to live in. And just as the history of the self expands to become the history of the family, so the history of the home expands to become the history of the locality.

What is the locality? It can mean various areas enclosed within widening circles outward from our homes. Perhaps it is the area within the normal range of the family car; perhaps it is the area from which children go to the same schools, or from which housewives trade at the same stores; perhaps it is the area in which people read the same newspapers, or the area affected by the opening and closing of the same industrial plants; perhaps it is the area governed by the same local government. A locality is in fact each or any one of these areas, each in its relation to the others and to areas yet more extensive.

Each of these areas has qualities of individuality. Like a person, it is in some respects unique. And yet it also resembles other localities and is in some respects typical. The city of St. Paul is the elder sister of Vladivostok and the younger sister of Melbourne, Australia. Like its sister cities throughout the world, it has felt the impact of the

great social and economic forces of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But it has felt them also in a way peculiar to itself. A fifth of the people who make up the population of St. Paul have come from abroad. From the same villages out of which they migrated, other individuals migrated to Stockholm, to Oslo, and to Salt Lake City. If you would know the life of this community in its relation to the widening circle with which it is in contact, you would find that it touches ultimately the most remote margins of the world. But from no other point will the world have exactly the same aspect as it has from the city of St. Paul. Just as there is a world history that stems out from the family background of every individual, so there is a world history that stems out from the special situation of every community.

We are well aware that just as genealogy has in some cases offered a superficial travesty of family history, so a type of promotional literature in our communities has in a superficial way called attention to the special excellencies and peculiarities of our various localities, and an antiquarian interest has resulted in the accumulation of diverse and unrelated items of information. This is not the kind of local history of which I speak.

Before our task as historians in a democracy is completed, we should have not only histories of every community, but histories of everything from the standpoint of every community. I think it would almost be safe to say that in no two schools, were they only one mile apart, should the social studies be taught from the same book. This, of course, is a counsel of perfection, but it serves to emphasize an unquestionable fact which should enter into our thinking constantly, and that is that the important things that the study of history should present to the mind can in a great number of cases be illustrated either directly or by contrast from material close at hand. I doubt whether anyone is fully competent to teach social studies even in an elementary

school until he has learned the possibilities of finding illustrative material within the area known to the students that he teaches. In the century of the life of this community is there any significant world movement that does not in some way find illustration? Here was a point on the great frontier of European culture that extended in an enormous sweep from the Ural Mountains and the Caucasus, along the South African rivers, along the coasts of Australia, and into the inland areas of Latin America. Here, as on the plains of Central Asia, plowmen fought with nomads for the plains. Here was felt the change from fur trading to grain farming, the coming of the factory age. Here came the shift from river to railroad transportation, and thence to automobiles and trucks. Here came the cultural development of popular education, the contact of religion and science. Go down the table of contents of any good book on western civilization and, item by item, it will be discovered that if the thing was important in one way or another, it happened in St. Paul.

Now it is not easy to discover exactly how it happened in St. Paul. If I were asked, for instance, to make a study of the influence of French culture, or Chinese art, or Darwinism upon the world generally, I would find the task very much simpler than if I were asked to identify these influences in this city. And the history I would write would be easier to write precisely because it would be farther from the ground and more remote from reality.

Consider for a moment some of the great synthetic conceptions with which historians have sought to unify their vision of many events over a long period of time. Consider such an idea as economic determinism, or the frontier thesis in American history, or even the elaborate creations of Oswald Spengler in his interpretation of western civilization. These things also, to the extent that they are true, should be capable of demonstration from materials in this

historical society about events that have taken place within one mile of this platform.

I have suggested that family history is related as a spiritual adjunct to a material aspect of our culture. Let me say the same thing of local history. In everything that relates to the planning of a community and to regional development, to the work of such bodies as state planning commissions, this localized information is of the highest practical importance. And a true conception not only of the character of a locality, but also of its relation to the state and the nation, is the essential spiritual food of an enlightened federalism. It is only in the presence of a historical vision in which the local community and all the more comprehensive communities are seen, each with its appropriate values, that we can order the relations of these bodies to each other in a stable and wholesome way.

Let me go beyond this: from the problem of federalism in America to the problem of world relations and world peace. For twenty years there have been ringing in the ears of historians the words of that great president of the American Historical Association, Henry Morse Stephens, uttered during the World War: "Woe unto you teachers of history and writers of history if you cannot see written in blood the result of your writing and teaching." The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has studied and compared the school books in which the children of the various nations of the world are respectively introduced to the history of the great world society in which we live. They have found, as Stephens found, that these histories as they are taught build a wall stronger than steel at the national frontier. The development of the nation state in modern times and the destruction of the international community were accompanied by a concentration of all the attention of each people upon the unity and distinctness of their own state to the exclusion of any other.

The kind of history of which I speak does not concen-

trate all attention on the national border. Rather it exhibits to the mind of a student a series of borders with the lines drawn within the national frontier as well as beyond it. If I am able to see that my own community can have its own values, its own traditions, preserved intact from the past and projected into the future, and at the same time participate securely in the life of a larger community, such as the state or nation, then I shall also be able to envisage the life of my nation as a thing having secure values, both past and future, but yet cradled within the larger compass of the world. World history alone will not make of us world citizens. We must see the whole relationship—local, state, regional, national, and international—all the way from the top to the bottom. Each community has its own membership certificate in the Great Society. And until history can teach us this, the symbols of world peace will be empty symbols.

Let me call attention to the special quality of the argument I am advancing for family and local history. It has long been recognized that a better national history can be written when biography and local history have been more fully explored. That is important, but I would hold that even if a chapter of local history should prove to be a stone unused by the builder of national history, it is worth the effort for the sake of its intrinsic value in the community to which it relates. Family and local history need not sustain any particular family or local myth. They can be investigated ruthlessly and relentlessly without any effort to reach a preconceived conclusion. And still, by their very nature, they will enrich and nourish a democratic culture. Their values are primary values. They can stand on their own feet.

I hope that I have established the importance both spiritual and material of the development of family and local history as essential historical contributions to a federative

democracy. Now I turn to the third item of the program—to the participation of people generally in the labor of conducting historical investigation and writing history. This participation is indeed an essential element of the program I have just outlined. For clearly there are not enough professional historical scholars in the country to begin to touch the immeasurable task of putting together the histories that lie back of each of us and of every locality, to write histories of millions of families, and thousands of communities. We do not have at the moment the personnel; we do not have the apparatus. But I think we can see whence both the personnel and the apparatus will come. It took us several generations to build up the corpus of published material, to make the critical studies, to collect the bibliographies, to organize the knowledge from which our present historical writing is documented. Our Ph.D.'s move sure-footed through this material. If I want to work on the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, I know where to look for the material, and I can begin where the last scholar left off. But if I want to write the history of my family, or of the school district in which my son is going to school, I find nothing prepared for me. It will take us several generations to adapt and complete the documentary equipment for the writing of family and local history. It took us several generations also to train the army of scholars in the tradition of the craft. It may well take us several generations to train every man to be his own historian.

Our library shelves are already loaded with the printed product of historical research according to existing standards. The new history may perhaps develop an entirely new library technique. We have crowded the publishing industry to the limit of its financial endurance in multiplying and distributing works of historical scholars in their present vein. We may have to depart entirely from the printing technique in reproducing the written word and distributing it to readers. Profound educational and techno-

logical changes lie ahead of us in the development of this program. Let me describe these prospects.

Let me speak first of the body of research material and then of the research personnel. What is the documentation that must be accumulated and rendered accessible if the kind of history I have been discussing is to be written? There are three classes of documents in which the bulk of the record is to be found. These are the public archives, the newspapers, and the manuscript materials, such as family papers and business records that survive. Yet it is in them that all of us and all our ancestors have left the legible traces of our lives. A person who would undertake to utilize these materials under present conditions would be in the position of someone undertaking to write national history in the absence of bibliographies, guides, learned journals, and sets of published documents. The historical records survey, organized as a unit of the WPA, has been working for a year, with workers in every state in the Union, to make an inventory of this material.

To put this material in order is a task so vast that it staggers the imagination. The inventory of county archives alone will be a monster set of volumes of three hundred thousand pages. The inventory of town, city, and village records will be equally extensive. The inventory of church records may be even larger. The workers who are making this inventory are giving us for the first time an accurate statement of what records are available throughout the country, where they are to be found, and what general type of information is contained within each of them. It is in these records—the records of wills probated, of court proceedings, of land transactions, of business licenses—that the common man leaves his traces. In such noble volumes as the *Documentary History of the Constitution*, only the few and the great have left mementoes of their lives; but in these millions and millions of obscure documents, standing on the shelves of thousands of public buildings through-

out the country, all our names are written down. The inventory is only the beginning. When the inventory is completed, there must follow progressive analyses of these records, so that it will become progressively a more simple task to glean from them the specific information that may be desired.

For the last few years the American Library Association has undertaken for the first time to bring together a list of the newspaper files that are accessible in public libraries and university libraries throughout the country. Its work is now being supplemented by that of the historical records survey, which is uncovering additional files in more obscure depositories. Relief workers in a number of cities are compiling lists of available newspaper files. Chicago's is completed. Within a short time we shall be able to know what newspaper files have been preserved, where they are to be found, what areas and what periods they cover. And again that is only a beginning, for a human life is not long enough to plow through newspaper files to glean information on topics so specific as those involved in the writing of all family history and much local history. When we know where the newspaper files are, we will require indexes, calendars, and digests to make reference to them, or to the information contained in them, as simple and convenient as reference to a topic in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In dozens of centers throughout the country, in half a dozen in Minnesota alone, and again in connection with the work relief program, different kinds of controls to this newspaper information are being elaborated. Here it is an index to proper names, there it is a subject index, or again it is a digest of local news. When we have found the right ways of preparing subject guides to newspaper information and to the information contained in local archives, there will be laid out for us a task that will require an army of workers over a generation of time before it is completed. But when it is completed we will have at our finger tips access to the

documentation upon which an infinite number of local and family histories may be written.

As this material comes under control, we shall also look forward to increasing the control we shall have over manuscript records of various kinds—family papers and business records. The technique of rendering such material easily accessible and easily used is intricate. The Minnesota Historical Society is a leading pioneer in standardizing and developing this technique. We should not rest until we have contrived so adequate a means of making inventories, calendars, indexes, and lists of manuscript holdings that we can expect the possessors of manuscripts to render their own reports upon their own holdings in such a way as to make them the common property of the world of scholarship. When these things are accomplished—and it will take a generation to do them—then we shall have in hand for the writing of family and local history equipment comparable to that which scholars possess today for the writing of national history.

The task seems vast—but this is a vast country. And the accident of the WPA white-collar relief program has already gone far enough to show that it can be done. The material foundations for a historical renaissance are being laid.

When the materials of our vast historical workshop are assembled in the way I have outlined—archives, newspapers, and manuscripts—we must take thought of the installation of the working equipment, the conveyor belt, that will carry the product while it is being worked upon. The system that has been operated hitherto in scholarship for this purpose has been the system of publication.

In the writing of history from the sixteenth century to the present, as in all scholarly activity, scholars have keyed their activity, to a degree that they hardly realize, to the rhythm and technique of the printing press. Printing and

publication stand in our culture as the means by which hitherto scholars communicated their findings to one another and to the public. These are the devices by which scholars have supplied themselves in great measure with the documentary material from which they have drawn their conclusions. So deeply has this technique worked its way into our intellectual life that we hardly think of scholarship apart from publication. It often has seemed to us that the product of the creative mind, whatever its pure intellectual value may be, must remain socially valueless and ineffective until it is published, either as a book or as an article in a journal.

This system has had great efficiency in permitting scholars to distribute the labor of scholarship, so that a task, when once well done, need not be done over again. It has been indispensable in so far as scholars have had thoughts which it was appropriate they should communicate to a wide public. But there are some situations to which it is not adapted, and those are especially the situations in which it is desirable to distribute the product of intellectual labor to a few people only, rather than to a great number. For the printing press loses its economies and ceases to be an appropriate technique for the multiplying and distributing of writings unless one or two thousand copies at the least are to be manufactured and distributed.

In a program in which we would look forward to the compiling and writing of a history of every family and of every locality with an interpretation in each case that is special for the particular family or locality treated, we cannot envisage a large-scale multiplying of any of these works in the way in which we have been accustomed to envisage the publication of historical writings. A few copies only of a family history, perhaps one copy for each near relative and a few left over to be preserved in certain depositories, are all that would be required. The smaller the locality to be favored with a special historical interpretation of its own

life, the smaller the number of copies that ought to be produced.

Technology now offers the prospect that substitutes for printing may be at hand which will permit the production of books in editions small enough for the very specialized demand with which we are here concerned. There are many of these new techniques—mimeograph, hectograph, photo-offset, processes known by a number of trade names such as multilith—which are appropriate to the production of books in editions very much smaller than can be economically manufactured by the printing process. But I shall speak of one of these techniques only, and that is one that has long been familiar to us in another setting—the simple technique of blueprinting, which is used in reproducing the working drawings of architects and mechanical engineers.

Ordinarily if you go into the market to purchase a scholarly book, you will pay for it at the rate of one and two-tenths cents a page, or three dollars for a hundred thousand words. Ordinarily this hundred thousand words will be spread on two hundred and fifty or more pages, six by nine inches in dimension, each of which therefore covers a surface of fifty-four square inches. The entire book is laid out on approximately a hundred square feet of paper surface. Now you can go into any blueprinting office with a hundred square feet of the right kind of typescript, properly mounted in large sheets, and have a blueprint copy made for three dollars. More than this, by using the right kind of typewriter in the right way, you can put a typescript text on paper with such economy of paper surface that it will not take any more than a hundred square feet for a hundred thousand words. This means that a blueprint reproduction of a typescript text could actually be made to order for anyone who wanted it, and distributed to him at approximately the cost that he is accustomed to paying for a book. It might be that this text would come to him in a sheet like a newspaper page, but it would be legible and it would intro-

duce an entirely new situation into our system of distributing the product of intellectual work.

Let us suppose that each of you is an author and that each of you, using your leisure time over a period of years, has compiled the history of your own family. You might then wish to consider whether your work should be published. If you took it to Macmillan, that publisher would tell you, quite properly, that there was no prospect that a large enough number of people would wish to buy it to make it commercially feasible to set up your manuscript on the linotype machines and print off the normal publishing edition of two thousand copies. The same might very well be true if you should write the history of your street or of your town, and then you would be in possession of your manuscript and you would realize that just because there was no prospect of two thousand potential purchasers, there was no way of laying it before the more limited number of people who would really be interested in having it. Some people, under these conditions, have been able to finance private printing, but that cannot be a general solution. The blueprint method of reproduction would make it possible for you to prepare in the ordinary way, but with certain precautions as to format, a typescript copy; and then, whether the number of persons who wanted copies should prove to be great or small, the copies could be made to order for them at a cost per thousand words no greater than they are accustomed to paying.

This blueprint method of distributing writing would resemble, from the standpoint of financing, the old manuscript method. The medieval monasteries copied books for themselves and for one another. If someone wanted a copy of a particular volume, he arranged to have it made. There was no real difference between published and unpublished material, between books in print and books out of print. If Macmillan were able to offer the same kind of service that the medieval monasteries offered, the editors

would never question whether there was a probable demand for ten or a hundred or two thousands copies of the manuscript the author carried to the editorial office. It is only because the printing technique demands a very expensive first cost which must be absorbed by running a large number of copies that our publishers are unable to handle works of small probable circulation. Techniques that will permit us to manufacture a book to order, as was done in the old manuscript days, at a cost to the purchaser no greater than that which he is accustomed to paying for printed books, will completely change the whole situation in regard to the distribution of writings of all kinds, and particularly writings in the field of family and local history. Again it would be possible to say, as it was in the Middle Ages, that a book once written and deposited in the right place is in effect published, in that anybody who wants a copy of it can get it.

Now there are other new techniques which introduce other elements into the picture. There is, for example, micro-copying, a process by which documents are photographed in miniature on tiny strips of film, and then read by projecting them somewhat as one projects a lantern slide, except that the image is made to fall before the reader as if it were the page of a book. The special quality of this technique is that it permits large bodies of material to be copied very cheaply, and mailed at low transportation costs. For example, if a worker in St. Paul should discover by consulting the inventory of public archives that there are several thousand pages in Washington or in Boston of archival material that he needed to study, this technique would permit him to procure micro-copies of these pages for his own use for a few dollars. The apparatus that makes these results possible is only now being perfected; its utilization is only beginning; but the potential effect of it can clearly be foreseen. For it makes the entire documentary resources of the country available in a way that would not otherwise be possible, without travel and without

great expense, to workers anywhere in the country who may wish to use any part of them.

Aside from these uses of the blueprinting and photography methods, there are many processes, intermediate between these and publication by printing, adaptable to any situation that may arise in the gathering of material for research or in the distribution of its product.² Just as the complete control of our archives,—local and national,—our newspapers, and our manuscripts promises to supply us with the materials for the new history writing, so these technical processes promise to make these materials accessible to us and to enable us to distribute the results of our work as widely as their character makes necessary.

We have set up the high objective of historical enterprise in a democracy, outlined the labor that is necessary in preparing the raw materials, and sketched the description of the technical equipment that will be the substitute for publication as we have hitherto known it. Now what of the workers who are to delve into this material? When we have produced the material conditions which will make it possible for every man to be his own historian, how are we to create the intellectual conditions? This problem carries us into a review of certain of the objectives of our educational system and of certain potential lines for its development.

Our people are justly proud of the tremendous investment that they have made and are making in education. The investment is not alone in our vast plant, in the great staff of teachers and administrators, but also in the years of time which our youth spends in going to school—years which the youth in other countries may be spending on the

² See Robert C. Binkley, *Manual on Methods of Reproducing Research Materials* (Ann Arbor, Edwards Brothers, 1936). Herein are published the results of a survey conducted by the joint committee on materials for research of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council.

farm, in the workshop, in the army, or in the bread line. Somewhere in that great system there are to be found the human resources, the personnel, that could carry out a program of the democratization of historical scholarship, and indeed of all scholarship.

In dealing with the personnel problem in scholarship, our learned world has looked for its recruits to the graduate schools. We have felt the need of more and better Ph.D.'s, who will find their careers in our universities or in research institutions. Our personnel program has been one of giving supertraining to potential superscholars. This personnel is only a fraction of what is potentially available to do work of scholarship. The potential resources which we have hitherto neglected, but which we might just as well develop, will be found in two large groups, which I shall define as professional and amateur.

This distinction between professional and amateur has only a financial significance. By a professional scholar I mean someone who is paid for doing a job that includes some scholarly activity; by amateur, I mean someone who engages in scholarly activity for the fun of it or for the glory of it. I do not mean to imply that there is necessarily any higher quality in the one than in the other, nor that the best minds of the country are necessarily those which inevitably will be drawn to the professional rather than to the amateur interest.

It seems evident that there are two great bases upon which research scholarship can be extended. If the teaching staff of the high schools could become in the next generation, as the teaching staff of the colleges has become in our own time, a group that would regard productive scholarship as a part of its profession, the ranks of professional scholarship would be opened and the number of professional scholars multiplied many fold. If enough of the technique of productive scholarly research could be taught as a part of the ordinary liberal arts curriculum leading to

the B. A. degree, the time would come when the upper group of our college graduates would have among it great numbers of individuals who, in their leisure time, would proceed with competence and enthusiasm in the hobby of research. This would enlarge the army of amateurs.

Certainly we cannot make great and distinguished contributors to science out of everyone. We must perhaps consider some new subdivision of the labor of scholarship, devise some simplified research techniques, and lay out the fields along the frontier of knowledge in a new way, before we can utilize fully the labors of such an army of investigators as that which I foresee. But the frontier is unlimited; there is room for everyone to stake his claim, and time for him to cultivate his garden. I believe this program would fit naturally as the next step in the development of teacher training, and in the development of the liberal arts curriculum of the ordinary American college, and even in the advancing program of our graduate schools.

In the training of high-school teachers, our educators have been aware of a growing tension in the last decades between emphasis on methods of teaching on the one hand and on content of subject matter on the other. This tension has in some cases reached almost the dimensions of a schism in our culture. The leaders who have emphasized method in the past generation had a great task to accomplish and in the main they have accomplished it. They led the country from the setting of the little red schoolhouse and the teaching technique of the birch rod to the setting of the union high school and the teaching technique of the project method and the Binet-Simon test.

But that job is done, and leaders in the field have come to realize that the next step will involve increasing in some way the teacher's knowledge of the full significance of what she is teaching along with her knowledge of how to teach it. This should draw the teachers' colleges nearer to the liberal arts colleges.

The synthesis of liberal arts training with teacher training, in a combination that will deepen the values of both, stands today as a major unsolved educational program. One way of solving it would be to develop the ability of high-school teachers to make scholarly investigations of their own localities from the historical, economic, social, or cultural standpoints. Such studies would at once provide them with significant teaching materials and yield their data as new findings in the inductive structure of the social sciences and history. The very same development that would enrich and dignify the intellectual standing of the high-school teaching profession would at the same time serve the bachelor of arts by offering him a creative channel into which to direct his intellectual enthusiasm. The beginnings of this are already at hand, and not in the field of history alone. In my own university, for instance, the department of political science has consistently stood for the training of its undergraduate students in the understanding of politics by beginning with the city of Cleveland and ending with Plato and Aristotle. Bachelors of arts with that training can become contributors to scholarship in local government; they need not aspire to be commentators on the Greek classics. Yet I have the feeling that the students who have received that training come to realize that Aristotle knew a great deal about Cleveland, Ohio. We do not narrow our intellectual program when we keep one end of it rooted in the ground at home.

I do not underestimate the difficulty of the task of intellectual engineering that lies before us; but neither, I believe, do I underestimate the magnitude of possible results. By some critics it has been regarded as a tragedy that the mass development of higher education, while making us a nation of college graduates, did not succeed in making us a nation of scholars. We can go very much farther toward becoming a nation of scholars if we will mark out for ourselves this whole array of new and interesting research problems

in family and local history; define the technique by which the work can be done with the new material that is being made available; organize the system by which the results may be distributed by means of these substitutes for printing; and train for the future a generation of professional and amateur scholars who will take pride in their membership in the great republic of scholarship, even as they derive value from the work they are doing. There are in the country today just enough effective scholars in our high schools, just enough amateurs who are using for scholarship their leisure time from business or family occupations, to prove that the thing can be done.

Let me now emphasize again the importance in a democracy of a widespread understanding of the scientific method and the value of research. There is no other common ground upon which all citizens of a democracy can meet than that afforded by a common respect for truth and confidence in the procedures of investigation by which the truth is discovered. Science, even social science, has built up a great prestige value in the public mind. But beware! If the public is merely looking on from the outside at the quaint and interesting labors of our research men, then, even though it may defer to the conclusions reached by research, its deference will be unsubstantial. It will set up the professor against the business man, believing in the business man one day and in the professor the next. Such things as academic freedom will be for the public catch words, the real meaning and significance of which it does not understand. To protect democracy, we must protect the spirit of free inquiry for truth; and to protect the spirit of free inquiry for truth, we must broaden the number of people who participate in the inquest.

The situation suggests a parallel from the early days of the automobile. When automobiles were owned by the few, the public attitude toward them was a mixture. In some ways there was great respect for the automobilist, but

on the other hand there was any amount of hampering legislation, and the goggled automobilist drove in the dust on a road with a speed limit of eight miles an hour. But when the bulk of the people became automobilists, then public roads were built, the speed laws changed, and in general the automobile came to fit itself into our culture as a thing commonly understood by all. So also with the method of the scholar. If it be confined in its practice to the few, it may indeed be respected; but the respect given it will not be rooted to withstand the shock of interest, prejudice, and passion. For Plato the great republic was one in which philosophers were kings; if our people are to be our kings, let them also be philosophers.

Let me recapitulate: The formula of history for a democracy is exactly what is implied if we accept the dictum that the writing of history and the making of laws are things that go together. It must be a history of the people as a democracy wants them to be—each with his own individuality held sacred, each with his freedom self-restrained by his own understanding of the values of all the concentric communities in which he is a citizen. Let us therefore have history of the people, by the people, and for the people. This is a long-range program in cultural strategy.

ROBERT C. BINKLEY

WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
CLEVELAND, OHIO



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).