

THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1938¹

THE ANNUAL REPORT of a state historical society must deal with a multitude of details and a variety of activities, but they need to be viewed in the setting of general purposes. Records are collected and preserved, resources made available to the people, funds and services administered, and efforts made to promote historical understanding. These things are fundamental, for they center about history, which a great historian has defined as the "self-consciousness of humanity—humanity's effort to understand itself through the study of its past." The goal, as Professor Frederick J. Turner puts it, is the "living present," and so he emphasizes the unity and continuity of history. In the same spirit Dr. Folwell, speaking before the state legislature, once declared that the people are "custodians and trustees of the traditions, the institutions, the learning, the arts, and the faiths of the past," and he stressed their duty to hand them on, enhanced and enriched, to posterity. "To meet this duty," he said, "we must know our state—what she has been and what she has done." Toward such objectives the Minnesota Historical Society must steer its course. They lend importance even to the most routine and prosaic tasks that it carries on from year to year.

The challenge of state and local history served as the theme of a brilliant and provocative annual address delivered before the society by Professor Edgar B. Wesley at the eighty-ninth annual meeting, held on January 10. Professor Wesley took as his subject "History at Home" and contended that local history is "the beginning and the end of

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our historical efforts." History, he said, not only begins at home, but is written there and has its chief utility there. The annual meeting was a suitable occasion for preaching such doctrine, for it opened with a local history conference and included in its several sessions a number of other papers and addresses emphasizing the local historical approach. The society held its sixteenth annual summer tour and convention on July 29 and 30, going to the North Shore and holding sessions at Gooseberry State Park, Duluth, and old Fond du Lac. Among the speakers were the Wisconsin historian, Dr. Louise Phelps Kellogg, and the novelist, Mrs. Margaret Culkin Banning of Duluth. The closing session, which attracted an audience of six thousand persons, consisted of the presentation by the members of the Northwest Territory pioneer caravan of a pageant entitled "Freedom on the March," commemorating the sesquicentennial of the Ordinance of 1787 and the coming of American settlers into the Old Northwest. The summer conventions continue to stir wide public interest because they set up a correlation between history and particular places and regions. After last summer's tour one newspaper editor, commenting on this correlation, wrote that as a result the "Local record and, in a sense, history in its entirety, take on the vigor of real life."

Among the problems confronting the society is that of extending its membership. At the end of the year 1938, there were 1,315 active members, 198 subscribing schools and libraries, and 47 institutional members, making a general total of 1,560, as compared with 1,570 a year ago. There was an increase of an even dozen in subscribing schools and libraries and of 4 in institutional members, but despite the enrollment of 65 new active members and the reinstatement of 3, there was a general decrease of 26 in this category, owing to the loss of 31 through death and the dropping of 63 as a result of nonpayment of dues. The general membership of the society is large as compared with

many historical societies throughout the country, but the active co-operation of present members is vitally needed if we are to maintain and to extend the membership. It is to be hoped also that the number of contributing life members—now only 10—will be substantially increased.

The society's quarterly magazine, *MINNESOTA HISTORY*, completed its nineteenth volume in 1938. It contains seventeen formal articles in addition to nearly forty other items and, with its index, will make a volume of more than five hundred pages. The attention given in the magazine to social and economic history is perhaps notable. Its articles include accounts of two Minnesota agricultural leaders, Wendelin Grimm and Professor T. L. Haecker; studies of such homely aspects of frontier life as words and phrases used by pioneers and their home remedies and sanitation; the story of the rise of baseball in Minnesota; an essay in two parts on a notable pioneer cultural leader, Henry M. Nichols; Professor Wesley's address on "History at Home"; an account of the early western fur trade; and numerous other subjects. Professor Allan Nevins of Columbia University recently wrote that the magazine had no more appreciative reader than himself. "I read it almost from cover to cover," he said, "and treasure the old issues."

Other publications of the year include the quarterly *Check List of Minnesota Public Documents* and the monthly *Minnesota Historical News*. A volume of unusual interest now nearly ready for publication consists of the diaries of two pioneer farmers of Minnesota in the period from the 1840's to the 1860's. These have been edited, with an introductory essay, by Dr. Rodney C. Loehr of the University of Minnesota. Considerable editorial progress has been made during the year on various other volumes of historical material, including the Graham travel diary, which records the experiences of an English hunter in the Northwest in 1847, and a collection of missionary documents relating to the Red River Valley, both edited by Dr. Nute; a selection of the

writings of the frontier journalist, James M. Goodhue, edited by Mrs. Berthel; and sundry special bulletins, notably a guide to the records of organizations as preserved in the society's manuscript division, and a bibliography of the writings of Dr. Warren Upham.

The society's need of a special endowment to be used in forwarding the editing and publishing of basic sources for the history of Minnesota and the Northwest becomes greater with every year. As long ago as 1929 my predecessor, Dr. Buck, termed this a pressing need. It has not been met in the intervening years. Meanwhile, our wealth of unpublished sources becomes greater and greater—diaries, letters, narratives, and other records that should be put before the world in published form. A year ago I suggested the great usefulness that donations or bequests for this cause would have, and I venture here to repeat the suggestion.

Year by year the society continues to build up its historical treasures, a fundamental task in which success depends upon many factors, including patient staff work, the increasing prestige of the society, and the spread of popular interest in Minnesota history. The library was enriched during 1938 by the addition of 2,794 books, pamphlets, and bound volumes of newspapers, bringing the total count to 197,654, which includes 3,679 pamphlets that have been classified in the society's newly organized pamphlet file. Currently received periodicals total 950, of which 421 are published in Minnesota; and the society is filing 548 current newspapers, 478 of which are published in this state. Nearly sixty per cent of the year's library accessions were received as gifts.

Among many interesting additions to the newspaper collection are a partial file of a Finnish newspaper, *Uusi Kottimaa*, published at New York Mills; a large collection of Minnesota German papers; a group of miscellaneous labor newspapers from the late nineties; and a few issues of the rare *Sauk Rapids Frontiersman*. Newly acquired library items of special interest include rare volumes by Crespel,

Hennepin, and Lahontan from the French period and films and photostats of a number of early Minnesota pamphlets. The Minnesota chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy made available a fund for the purchase of books relating to the history of the South; and such organizations as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Daughters of Founders and Patriots have aided the society in building up its genealogical collection. These activities suggest the desirability, both for organizations and individuals, of setting up in the society's library special collections in given fields, sometimes, perhaps, in the form of memorials commemorating events or honoring individuals.

The manuscript collection, with 193 accessions, some of them representing extensive collections of papers, enjoyed a normal growth during the year. The personal papers of several political leaders were received, including those of John Nicols, a pioneer state senator and university regent; Leonard A. Rosing, prominent in the Democratic party about the turn of the century; and the late Governor Floyd B. Olson. Important additions were made to the papers of Hans Mattson, one-time secretary of state in Minnesota and an influential promoter of immigration; and a notable collection of papers was received from Dr. Henry M. Bracken, secretary of the Minnesota state board of health from 1897 to 1919. The great variety of subjects touched upon in new collections of personal papers may be judged from the fact that they include the records of the Hutchinson family, founders of the Minnesota town that bears their name and nationally famous in the 1850's and 1860's for their concerts; Henry M. Nichols, pioneer colonizer, minister, and cultural leader; members of the Harrington and Pendergast families of Hutchinson; Sylvanus B. Lowry, pioneer of St. Cloud; Irvin Grant, a telegraph operator of 1868; Theophilus L. Haecker, the "father of dairying in Minnesota"; Edwin H. Brown, a Minneapolis architect; Ransom J. Powell, a Minneapolis attorney; Hiram W.

Slack, a St. Paul educator; and Mrs. Beatrice Gjertsen Besesen, a noted opera singer. Many of these collections are of particular interest from the point of view of the social and economic history of Minnesota and the Northwest.

Not a few important diaries, originals or copies, have been obtained by the society. Minnesota exploration is represented by that of James E. Colhoun, astronomer and assistant topographer with the Stephen H. Long expedition of 1823; and life at old Fort Snelling is pictured in a diary kept at the frontier post in 1827 by Colonel Josiah Snelling himself. The latter is supplemented by a book of orders kept at the fort in 1826 and 1828. Frontier life in the fifties is reflected in the diaries of Samuel C. Gale of Minneapolis and Benjamin Drew of St. Paul; and in a fascinating record kept by Governor Ramsey while on a trip to the upper Mississippi country in 1850. The society is gradually building up a remarkable collection of diaries relating to farm life and agricultural development; and to this collection have recently been added diaries kept by Nimrod Barrick in Meeker County from 1871 to 1932; by John W. Murray of Excelsior from 1864 to 1873; and by Edward H. S. Dartt of Steele County from 1873 to 1901. Newly acquired reminiscent narratives include those of Julia A. Wood, a pioneer journalist and novelist of Sauk Rapids who wrote under the pen name of "Minnie Mary Lee"; Calvin R. Fix, a Scott County pioneer and a soldier in the Civil War; and the Reverend Joseph Goiffon, a Catholic missionary in the Red River Valley. Of interest also in connection with Minnesota missions is the manuscript of a Sioux-English dictionary compiled by John F. Aiton, a missionary at Red Wing's village in 1848.

The society has had considerable success in recent years in enriching its collection of the archives of churches and organizations. During 1938 it has acquired the records of the First Covenant Church of St. Paul; the Mapleton Congregational Church; and Swedish Methodist Episcopal

churches in Evansville, Melby, Colfax, and Farwell; and it has added the records of two women's societies of the Macalester Presbyterian Church of St. Paul; the Trades and Labor Assembly of St. Paul; the Community League of Oxboro Heath; the Thirteenth Minnesota Regimental Association; the Litchfield Cemetery Association; the Rover's Club of Excelsior; the Columbian Club of Minneapolis; the Minnesota Academy of Medicine; and St. Agnes Court of the Catholic Order of Foresters, a fraternal benefit society of St. Paul.

Meanwhile, the society has cast a wide net for Minnesota historical materials preserved abroad or in other parts of this country. This effort has brought in copies of more than a hundred "America letters," the originals of which are preserved in Norway; transcripts of numerous articles about Minnesota in eastern newspapers; and filmstrips of ten thousand pages of records in the archives of the American Home Missionary Society in Chicago, of some thirteen hundred pages of church archives at St. Boniface, Manitoba, and of three hundred items in the National Archives at Washington.

The collections in the museum were enlarged in 1938 by 1,178 gifts which are classified as historical, ethnological, archaeological, and numismatic. There were also added 2,784 pictures, which bring the society's picture collection to a grand total of 63,889. This particular collection, it may be noted, has grown by about twenty-six thousand items in the past ten years. The society also has a large collection of negatives, slides, and cuts, to which about eight hundred additions were made in 1938. A painting of unusual interest received recently is a view of Minnehaha Falls executed in 1903 by the Danish scenic artist, Peter G. Clausen. Nearly a hundred items were added to the collection of early telephone equipment presented last year by Mr. George W. Johnson. An interesting item of furniture recently acquired for the museum is a Governor Winthrop desk from 1789.

Uniforms and military equipment of the Spanish War period that belonged to the late Captain William B. Folwell were added to the collection of Folwell family material, which has also had important manuscript additions.

One of the most notable of all gifts to the society is the Frank B. Kellogg memorial, which consists of an extraordinary collection of robes, hoods, medals, and diplomas and other certificates of honor, all illustrating the services and achievements of the late Frank B. Kellogg. Thanks to the generous interest of the senator, as recorded in his will, and of Mrs. Kellogg, this colorful and historically valuable collection has been transferred to the society and installed in four special wall cases, three table cases, and eight wall panels. At the central point in the display is a copy of De Laslo's oil portrait of Senator Kellogg, made especially for this collection at the instance of Mrs. Kellogg, to whom the thanks and appreciation of the society and the state are richly due. The collection was inaugurated by a special ceremony held in the society's building on December 12.

The Historical Records Survey, directed by Mr. Hodnefield and employing a large staff of WPA workers, has functioned throughout the year and has a substantial record of achievement. Its survey of the county archives has been completed in all the counties of the state; it has published three additional county inventories; and it has others in process of publication. It has also brought out inventories of certain classes of federal archives preserved in this state, notably for the departments of agriculture, treasury, and navy. Its surveys of records include municipalities, townships, schools, cemeteries, organizations, manuscript collections, and many other groups, and it has recently taken over the task of making an inventory of early American imprints preserved in institutions in Minnesota. In all these fields its work amounts to a systematic stocktaking with respect to historical materials in this state. As its mimeographed inventories mount in number and widen in scope, the great

value of the records survey will be more fully realized by officials, local history workers, and many others.

The society's special WPA project has operated during the year with a personnel of approximately thirty under the general supervision of the curator of the museum. This project, devoting itself to nonroutine undertakings, has made many important contributions, among which may be mentioned additional miniature models of historical scenes, the advance of the picture index, the repair of newspapers, books, and manuscripts, the transcription of accounts of early Minnesota travels and other records, the cleaning and arrangement of documents, the completion of the card index to the Minnesota names in the census of 1860, additions to the newspaper bibliography, inventorying and other library enterprises, the mapping of historic trails and sites, and the construction of cases, card files, and other kinds of furniture and equipment for the various departments of the society. The society similarly owes much to the general Capitol WPA project, which, save for the installation of heating, virtually completed the construction of the upper terrace addition and has also extended heating and ventilation to the lower terrace room. The task of installing one level of steel stacks in the lower area has made relatively slow progress, but so much has been done that there is promise of occupation during the coming year. The lower and upper terrace projects should prove a boon to the society both for newspaper filing and for general storage and filing.

In every department strenuous efforts have been made to carry forward the routine of accessioning and cataloguing, of arranging and filing materials, of indexing, and of general administration; but the pressure of public demands upon the time of the staff, coupled with the plain fact that the staff has not been expanded as its work has almost doubled, has created many difficulties. The library catalogued 2,281 items in 1938 and added 17,517 cards to the various card index files. The Minnesota biographical index

was enlarged by 1,106 new cards, and 3,503 cards were received and filed in the American genealogical index. The special index of coats of arms grew by fifteen hundred new cards, and some three thousand additions were made to old entries.

The museum arranged 45 special exhibits, completed through the WPA project five new miniature historical groups, advanced the picture index by 13,501 cards, and added considerable equipment such as wall and group cases and index files. The museum curator, in the course of his year's work, has made no fewer than eighteen field trips outside the Twin Cities to advance the interests of the society. In the manuscript division the index to the census of 1860, completed under the WPA project, was installed in a special file. The division faces a crisis in its need for additional personnel, for the manuscript collection has become one of the great divisions of the society, with complex problems of administration coupled with a phenomenal increase of public use. It is therefore essential that under the new budget it should have a new full-time assistant. Despite its burdens, however, it has arranged many large collections of manuscripts, advanced its photographic work, added a film desk reader and other new equipment, supervised the cleaning, overhauling, and inventorying of the War Records Commission archives, arranged a number of special exhibits in the hall cases, and carried on a considerable amount of field work in its ceaseless search for new manuscript materials to add to the collection.

Dr. Nute was in Europe on leave from May to August, searching for Minnesota materials in archives and special collections in several countries, notably Sweden, where she collected data on the backgrounds of the Lindbergh family, and in England and Scotland. In Edinburgh, in the papers of Lord Strathcona, she examined several volumes of Northwest Company papers and made arrangements for reproducing much material relating to early Minnesota. She

also found and copied Minnesota historical records in the Hudson's Bay Company archives in London. On her return she stopped at West Point to photograph eighteen original water-color paintings of the pioneer artist Peter Rindisbacher, most of them of early Minnesota scenes. In November she made a trip to Winnipeg, gave three addresses there, forwarded good will and co-operation between our own society and the society in Manitoba, and also secured microfilms of many documents of special Minnesota interest.

The newspaper department, too, is coping with difficult problems of administration occasioned in part by the vast increase in the use of its resources and in part by the lack of adequate space both for readers and for filing its collections. When the stacks and shelves are installed in the lower terrace, the filing problem will be met, but the problem of the reading room offers no immediate solution. The mere task of receiving, recording, and filing more than five hundred newspapers regularly bulks large in the work of the newspaper department. It has also arranged for the binding of 570 volumes and, with WPA assistance, has repaired some 3,500 separate issues of newspapers. It keeps in constant touch with editors and publishers the state over in order to secure new papers as they appear from time to time. The head of the department has also made frequent field trips in search of old files and other historical records. The work on the great project of a bibliography and inventory of newspaper files has been advanced steadily. Final drafts were completed during the year on twenty-one counties, so that, in all, the work has now been finished on forty-seven of the eighty-seven counties of the state. The department is also co-operating with the Minneapolis Public Library in a great WPA project for indexing Minneapolis newspapers. This project, it may be added, is under the supervision of Miss Gratia A. Countryman, a member of the society's executive council.

Perhaps the outstanding fact about the society and its work during 1938 has been the unprecedented use of its collections by the public. The manuscript division has served 1,849 students and readers, more than the combined total of the four years from 1929 to 1932. Similarly, the museum, with a general attendance of about 43,000, has had visits from 369 school classes, the largest number for one year in the society's history. These classes brought to the Historical Building 10,830 teachers and pupils. In the newspaper department there were 3,416 readers, as compared with 2,685 in 1937, and these readers called for nearly 11,000 bound volumes and more than 95,000 copies of current issues. Turning to the main library, the record discloses the fact that it has met the needs of 5,882 readers, a figure that may be compared with 4,025 four years ago. The various departments report users not only from our own state but from nearly twenty other states of the Union and from various foreign countries. Legislators and other state officials, scholars from various universities and colleges, novelists, local history workers, journalists and special writers, clergymen, business and professional men and women, genealogists, and scores of other classes and groups are represented. All this reflects an increasing public appreciation of the richness of the society's collections and it means increasing public service. At the same time, it is making even more critical the need for additional staff assistance and is compelling us to re-examine carefully the problem of accommodations. For the manuscript division, which now serves as many people in three months as it did in an entire year a decade ago, the increase of public service has meant "more tables, more chairs, more racks, more supervision, more page work, more repairs, and more calls upon the time of an extremely busy staff." A similar situation obtains in the museum and in other departments, and the society must find the means of meeting it adequately.

Closely allied to the public use of the society's collection

are the activities of the staff along public educational lines. The "Information Bureau," for example, handled during the year 375 requests for information about Minnesota history that came by mail, not to mention a much larger number of telephone inquiries, all representing a wide range of interest, with the Kensington rune stone holding first place in public curiosity. About ten members of the staff have responded to requests for talks and papers from clubs, local societies, radio stations, and regional and national organizations. In all, approximately seventy such requests have been met. Since they have largely centered about Minnesota history and the work of the society, it is safe to conclude that they have been of considerable value in promoting public interest in the society's objectives.

In appraising the advance of historical interest in Minnesota in recent years, it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the local history movement. It seems to gather momentum as time goes on. In 1938, for example, seven new county historical societies were formed. Today no fewer than fifty-five local historical societies are active throughout the state, whereas less than two decades ago there were none. Many excellent local museums have been built up and not a few of them receive thousands of visitors each year. Most of these museums are in courthouses or public libraries, but in some communities—New Ulm and Mankato, for example—the societies are now housed in splendid buildings of their own. From all parts of the state come reports of meetings, growing membership, the collecting of local historical records, the exchange of ideas, and numerous other signs of vigorous life. It is pleasant to be able to add that the state society has not only sponsored and encouraged the movement as a whole, but has also cooperated with the various local societies since their organization.

This year has witnessed a number of historical activities of general interest in which the society has played a part.

A member of the executive council—Senator Lawson—served as chairman of the state commission for the Northwest Territory sesquicentennial celebration in Minnesota, and the superintendent was its secretary-treasurer. The commission undertook many activities, but its principal concern was to arrange for the coming of the Northwest Territory pioneer caravan, which made a circuit of Minnesota from July 30 to August 18 and presented the Northwest Territory pageant in seventeen communities. For the Swedish-American tercentenary, in which Senator Lawson was also active, the society arranged special exhibits of books, newspapers, and manuscripts. The society has taken an active part in the great project for building at Grand Portage a replica of the eighteenth-century Northwest Company post, assembling historical data, managing through Mr. Babcock the archaeological work, and advising with Indian service officials on all details of reconstruction, which has already included the erection of most of the stockade. Similarly the society has advised and co-operated with the state park authorities in the excavation of the site of the Joseph R. Brown house near Sacred Heart, burned at the time of the Sioux Outbreak. The site is now a state park and the Brown mansion, after careful exploration of the ground under the supervision of Mr. Richard Sackett of the Historical Records Survey, is to be reconstructed. Through its WPA project the society has co-operated with the State Geographic Board in making a card index of Minnesota geographic names, preparatory to the compilation of a gazetteer, and in planning to change the names of some of the numerous Mud, Round, Long, and other lakes for which there are numerous duplicates. The manuscript division has co-operated with the park authorities in work on a map of historic trails and sites in the Northwest; and the society has also worked with the State Planning Board in its investigation of possibilities for new state parks, including such historic areas as Fort St. Charles, Nininger, and Frontenac.

Notwithstanding the unusual pressure of routine duties, staff members have managed to carry on a certain amount of research and writing and to express their professional interests in other ways. Dr. Nute is the author of the historical introduction to the new translation of Hennepin's *Description of Louisiana*, recently issued by the University of Minnesota Press. She continues to serve on the editorial board of the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* and has written articles for MINNESOTA HISTORY and the forthcoming "Dictionary of American History." She attended the annual meetings of the Society of American Archivists and the American Historical Association. Mr. Babcock has written many articles for the "Dictionary of American History," prepared several papers and addresses, managed the archaeological project at Grand Portage, directed the society's WPA enterprise, and attended a meeting in Chicago of the Upper Mississippi Valley Ethno-History Committee. Mr. Larsen has given much attention to the work on a gazetteer of state geographic names. In June he was awarded the degree of doctor of philosophy by the University of Minnesota, having completed a dissertation on the history of the Minnesota road system. Miss Ackermann wrote an interesting article for the society's quarterly and also contributed, as did Dr. Nute, to the American Library Association's volume entitled *Public Documents*. She attended the meeting of that association in Kansas City and presented a paper there. Mrs. Berthel undertook the revision of the *Guide to the State Capitol*, soon to be brought out by the state auditor. Miss Fawcett wrote a report on Minnesota's western boundary for MINNESOTA HISTORY. Miss Heilbron has continued her studies of Minnesota artists, published several articles and documents in the quarterly, and made a series of visits to county historical museums throughout the state. Mrs. Warming revised Minnesota articles for several encyclopedias and contributed more than three hundred corrections and additions to the

Union Serial List. Mrs. Brower has continued her bibliography of Minnesota fiction. Many staff members have written articles for the weekly series on state history appearing in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. The superintendent, among other things, published a book entitled *Building Minnesota* and also compiled a volume of *Readings in Early Minnesota History*. He has recently been elected a member of the advisory board of the American Council of Learned Societies.

The staff has met the problems of a heavy year with high efficiency and well deserves the thanks of the society. There were few staff changes. Miss Olive Clark, however, who has given nineteen years of faithful and effective service as museum assistant, was compelled by ill health to resign her position late in the year. In the early fall Elaine P. Cullen resigned as catalogue typist and her position was filled by the appointment of Louise Hedberg Blad, formerly a member of the staff. Following Miss Clark's resignation, Mrs. Blad was promoted to the position of museum assistant. Perhaps the greatest loss sustained in 1938 was the death of Everett H. Bailey, who had held the office of treasurer from May 10, 1909, to November 10, 1938, and whose interest, integrity, faithfulness, and competence have left an abiding influence upon the Minnesota Historical Society.

In submitting the biennial budget estimates to the state government, the society's executive committee took into account the compelling need for additional assistance in some of the departments, notably the manuscript division and the museum. It therefore included two new positions, which account in considerable measure for an increase of \$3,200 in the salary estimates, enlarging the salary budget from \$32,500 per year to \$35,700. This increase, if granted, would make possible a few necessary salary adjustments in addition to the creation of two sorely needed new positions. In order to meet needs for supplies, equipment, and the like, the committee requested \$15,500 for the first year of the biennium

and \$17,500 for the second. Only one other feature of the budget calls for mention and that is a request for additional funds of \$9,000 to complete the newspaper stacks and shelves and to provide, in addition, some badly needed map filing equipment. The estimates are based upon a realistic appraisal of the society's needs and a desire to promote its effectiveness in meeting the problems that its growth and success have created.

THEODORE C. BLEGEN

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL



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