

# Century Day: The Historical Society's One-hundredth Anniversary

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THE STATE'S OLDEST INSTITUTION, the Minnesota Historical Society, celebrated its one-hundredth year of service to the people of Minnesota with an all-day birthday party on October 20, 1949. The program was composed of four big events—a morning conference, a luncheon, an open house in the afternoon, and an evening banquet.

Some four thousand visitors, representing more than a dozen states and Canada and including delegates from nearly fifty of Minnesota's eighty-seven county historical societies, gathered in St. Paul that gray and rainy day to participate in the society's Centennial celebration. From Wisconsin and Michigan, Illinois and Iowa, North Dakota and New York, Indiana and Vermont, Ohio, Washington, D.C., and Ontario, Canada, came more than thirty distinguished guests comprising an impressive group of prominent historians, educators, and librarians. In addition, the event attracted hundreds of good friends from the North Star State.

The celebration began at 10:00 A.M., when about a hundred representatives of local historical societies met with state society staff members and other guests at the Minnesota Club in St. Paul for a conference under the direction of Mr. Arch Grahn, the society's field representative. The morning program was devoted to a discussion of both general and specific problems in local historical society work.

After extending a cordial welcome to all the visitors, Dr. Harold Dean Cater, the society's director, expressed the hope that this—the first conference to be held since the organization of local historical societies in all eighty-seven counties of the state—would be only the beginning of a series of such work-shop meetings with local groups. Mr. Bergmann Richards, president of the society, then spoke briefly,

stressing the necessity for interest in history at the local level if "the raw materials of regional history" are to be transmuted "into a finished and useful product leading the people into a knowledge and understanding of their political, economic, and cultural backgrounds." Mr. Grahn then called upon Dean Julius M. Nolte of the University of Minnesota extension division, who served as Centennial director, to review the activities of the Centennial year. In doing so, Dean Nolte emphasized "the nuggets of inspiration, pride, and serious devotion to the state" which were revealed in Centennial celebrations throughout the state. "These nuggets," he said, "are well worth quarrying." Dean Nolte stated that it was up to the local historical societies to keep this interest alive. "It would be criminal neglect for the state to lapse into disinterest for the next hundred years," he said.

Particular problems with which they were especially familiar were then discussed by state society staff members. Miss Polly Canfield, editor of the *Gopher Historian*, explained how a local society can work with the schools to set up a Gopher Historian chapter. "Newspapers and the Local Historian," some of the rewards and problems incident to a newspaper collection, were reviewed by Mr. Willoughby M. Babcock, curator of newspapers. Miss Esther Jerabek, head of the library accessions division, made practical suggestions for the library of the county historical society, and Mr. Warren Anderson of the museum staff explained a workable system for the cataloguing of museum items. Frequent and detailed reports on local society activities for use in *Minnesota History* were urgently requested by Miss Bertha L. Heilbron, editor of that magazine. Some types of early photography were discussed by Mr. William Bowell, curator of the pictorial department, and the problems of manuscript collecting were eloquently set forth by Miss Lucile Kane, curator of the manuscript division.

A brief question and answer period, much too short to take up all the problems presented, brought practical suggestions on increasing membership from Mrs. Grace Nye Willson of the Olmsted County Historical Society and on fund raising from Mr. P. J. Holland of the Mower County society. Mr. Henry N. Benson of the

Nicollet County group and Mrs. Earl A. Johnson of Sibley County asked about methods of financing a museum, and Mr. Joseph W. Zalusky of Hennepin County and Mrs. Ida Johnson of Fillmore County told of their recent experiences in this connection. As time was running out, the conference broke up and everyone filed into the dining room, where pine branches, miniature covered wagons, ox carts, and golden horns of plenty overflowing with native fruits had been arranged in an exceptionally attractive and appropriate decorative scheme by a committee of the society's women's organization.

In these festive surroundings about a hundred and seventy-five people gathered at 12:30 P.M. for the noontime news broadcast of Mr. Cedric Adams, who later acted as toastmaster. Following a delicious lunch, he introduced the first speaker, Dr. Solon J. Buck, chief of the manuscript division of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., a distinguished historian who was superintendent of the Minnesota society from 1914 to 1931. He spoke on historical societies as research centers, stressing two main aspects of the subject. First, the society should be a place to which scholars may turn for the materials and tools of research, said the speaker, and second, the society should itself engage in research and writing. Dr. Buck expressed the opinion that "the former is the primary and most important function of any state historical society."

Dean Theodore C. Blegen of the graduate school in the University of Minnesota, the second speaker, took as his subject "History of and for the People." He recalled his association with the society as assistant superintendent from 1922 to 1931 and as superintendent from 1931 to 1939, and said that some of his "cherished dreams" for the institution "are real today." Those "dreams of the great varied collections of the history of our people, records that tell us how the people built this state and what the modern debt is to the past, dreams of local historical societies with growing museums and active programs"—all these, he said, have come true. Dean Blegen noted particularly the importance of "the everyday people whose life is really the warp and woof of our history." In looking back over the century just past, he expressed the belief that

the society had "built upon secure foundations," and he predicted for the organization, "as an on-going institution, an enhanced service to the people and to the peoples' history." "I feel," he said of the society, "that on this day, its birthday, it will in a sense rededicate itself to that service as it faces forward on its second hundred years."

The third speaker, Dr. Paul Angle, director of the Chicago Historical Society, was spokesman for the thirty-odd out-of-state guests. Speaking of historical societies in America today, Dr. Angle said that one significant purpose of such a society, like that of musical organizations and art museums, is "the enrichment of living." "Imaginative recreation of the past," he said, "makes life in the present richer, makes it possible for men to live more fully than they could live without it. For history is something more than the dull pages of a textbook, and history as knowledge has its own satisfaction. I ask no more of history," he continued, "than that it satisfy a deep curiosity on the part of our fellow citizens. The purpose of a historical society is therefore limited to the making of a richer life."

Mr. Piercy Jay Hoffstrom, popular columnist and cartoonist for the *St. Paul Dispatch*, brought the luncheon program to a lively conclusion by drawing amusing caricatures of Judge Clarence Magney, Mr. Richards, Mrs. F. K. Weyerhaeuser, Dean Blegen, Mr. Julian Baird, and others.

For the open house which featured the society and its building from 3:30 to 5:00 P.M., some four thousand people crammed their way into the spacious corridors and galleries of the Historical Building to hear a program, view exhibits, and enjoy refreshments served from a beautifully appointed tea table by descendants of Minnesota territorial pioneers. The event was sponsored by the society's able and efficient women's organization, with Mrs. Bernard Ridder of St. Paul as the capable mistress of ceremonies for a brief program that preceded the opening of the special exhibits. She introduced Mrs. Margaret Culkin Banning, well-known Duluth author, who reviewed some of the changes which have characterized Minnesota history during the past century. Mrs. Banning recalled the incorporation of the Minnesota Historical Society in 1849 "by a new,

raw legislature uncertain of its own powers and future duties," but realizing "that the record must be kept." Since then, she continued, "the chronicle has never lapsed, never been dependent upon legend. The society has done the job it was created to do . . . to tell the truth and keep that truth safe."

Present also was Mr. Max Karl of radio station WTCN who broadcast on-the-spot interviews with a number of leaders and guests, including some of the women who arranged the magnificent display of century-old antiques for the occasion in the society's museum. The hundreds of handsome and authentic examples of furniture, glassware, porcelain, silver, jewelry, and the like were loaned by Twin City collectors and placed on public view especially for the society's birthday. These varied objects were assembled and beautifully arranged for display by members of the society's museum staff in co-operation with some two hundred members of the women's organization. The *Minneapolis Star* of October 18 called the afternoon event "a tea and an exhibit of antiques such as this region never has seen." All those who helped make this affair such an outstanding success deserve much praise.

Also on display for the anniversary celebration were a collection of old photographs in the pictorial department, and a group of important manuscripts and portraits from the society's collection. An attractively decorated booth called attention to the latest copies of the newly designed *Gopher Historian*, the society's magazine for young readers. A volume of Minnesota essays by Dean Blegen, *The Land Lies Open*, newly published by the University of Minnesota Press in a special numbered edition to commemorate the society's birthday, was the center of interest for an autographing party in the south gallery of the museum. Against a backdrop of Jo Lutz Rollins' charming water colors of "Historic Minnesota Landmarks," Dean Blegen autographed copies of the new book for enthusiastic purchasers crowding about this noted historian of the North Star State. Incidentally, copies of this special edition, autographed not only by the author, but also by Dr. Cater and Mr. Richards, may still be obtained from the society for three dollars each.

To the delight of stamp collectors the society had its own post office for one afternoon, issuing a cachet in honor of its one-hundredth birthday. Sponsored by the Twin City Philatelic Society and the historical society, the cachet is number eleven to appear this year in connection with the Centennial. It is not in the original series, however, and may be purchased separately for fifteen cents.

The birthday celebration culminated in an impressive Century Day banquet held in the Coffman Memorial Union on the University of Minnesota campus at 7:00 p.m. Nearly five hundred people attended this event, which was sponsored by the Minneapolis Junior Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Pierce Butler, Jr., well-known St. Paul attorney, was toastmaster, and the Reverend L. P. Cowley, chaplain of the Newman Club of the University of Minnesota, gave the invocation. An entertaining dramatization of significant and amusing episodes in the society's history, entitled "Pageant of the Past," was presented by members of the University of Minnesota Radio Guild under the auspices of the university radio station, KUOM. Written by Don Stubbs, produced by Northrop Dawson, Jr., with Robert Boyle as commentator, and Larry Larson as engineer, the skit drew appreciative applause from the delighted audience.

Another unusual feature of the evening program was the presentation of two national awards of merit by Mr. Earle Newton, director of the Vermont Historical Society, on behalf of the American Association for State and Local History. The first, which went to the society and was accepted by its president, was given: "For projecting a museum program that increased attendance more than four times the previous average; for organizing county historical societies on a statewide basis; for launching a dynamic program for the teaching of state and local history in Minnesota schools; for completion of 100 years of exemplary development and national leadership evidenced not only in its collections but in its broad public services; and for guiding the people of Minnesota in a grass roots celebration of their Territorial Centennial this past year." The second was presented to Mrs. Weyerhaeuser in recognition of her work in "making a unique contribution to the development and useful-

ness of state and local history by organizing for the Minnesota Historical Society a women's organization that has already successfully completed the first year's program of museum events, membership promotion, and the building of strong public relations." Both awards were voted at the annual meeting of the Association for State and Local History at Burlington, Vermont, on September 14, 1949.

Short talks followed on the society's successful first hundred years by Governor Youngdahl, Mr. Richards, and Mr. Theodore Glasserud, president of the Minnesota Junior Chamber of Commerce. Mr. John Lamb, on behalf of the Minneapolis Junior Chamber of Commerce, presented the society with a bound volume containing pictures and information about Minnesota's one-hundred living great citizens, selected for the Establishment Day dinner of March 3, 1949.

The winners of the membership contest conducted in connection with the birthday celebration were then announced by Dr. Cater. First prize went to Mrs. Emma Putzier Althaus Johnson of Crookston, who sponsored no fewer than a hundred new members, one for each year of the society's existence. Other winners include Mrs. Arthur H. Savage, Mrs. V. C. Armstrong, Mrs. Richard M. Elliott, and Miss Mary Sue Willes of St. Paul; Mrs. R. J. Nesbitt and Mr. H. W. Bishop of Minneapolis; Miss Edith B. Whitney of Virginia, and Dr. William L. Petersen, director of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

The principal speaker, Dr. Laurence M. Gould, president of Carleton College, Northfield, was next introduced. His inspiring and provocative address on "Minnesota Today and Tomorrow" was a fitting climax for an impressive program. Since it appears in full elsewhere in this issue, his remarks will not be reviewed here. The Century Day celebration came to a close with the singing of "Hail Minnesota," and the Minnesota Historical Society was triumphantly launched upon its second hundred years.



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