

The *EXPANDING* ROLE of HISTORY

—A Legislative View

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THE FOLLOWING essay has been condensed from a talk given by Mr. Fitzsimons on October 13, 1965, at the twenty-fifth annual meeting of the American Association for State and Local History in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Mr. Fitzsimons, who lives at Argyle and is state representative from the sixty-seventh district, is chairman of the house appropriations committee and a member of the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Commission. He also serves on the executive council of the Minnesota Historical Society. Ed.

IN MINNESOTA we have come to the conclusion that history is not only for scholars and classrooms. We view it as a natural resource and, in fact, we have passed legislation formally stating this fact.¹ The concept is not new, although perhaps the definition of historic sites as a natural resource is unique.

History's link with recreation has long been recognized. Minnesota's state park system had its beginning in 1889 when the legislature appropriated funds for purchasing a site to commemorate the release of 269 captives from the hands of the Sioux Indians in 1862. Many more of our state

parks owe their existence to the presence of history, either natural or man-made. Itasca is famed as the long-sought source of our nation's mightiest river; six state parks and waysides have been created to mark places of importance in the Sioux Uprising; others are associated with individuals, such as Charles A. Lindbergh; others preserve places where the state's varied industry emerged, such as the Soudan Mine (Tower-Soudan State Park); still others incorporate sites of significance in the fur trade and in the history of the Sioux and Chippewa. Nor is the association of history with parks and public recreation limited to Minnesota. That this is the attitude of the federal government is shown by the fact that the National Park Service has traditionally been given responsibility for maintaining and managing our national historic shrines.

In this context it is easy to understand the inclusion of history as an integral part of our state's program to accelerate the preservation and development of natural and recreational resources. From the viewpoint of the legislator, however, the justification for treating history as a resource is not limited to its traditional role as a reason for establishing a park where people may picnic, play ball, swim, hike, or camp. History is in itself a form of recreation.

I could cite statistics from our state or from the reports of the federal Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission to explain why history has grown in favor as a recreational pursuit.² The figures tell of an ever-increasing number of leisure

¹ See the Omnibus Natural Resources and Recreation Act of 1963, in Minnesota, *Session Laws*, 1963, p. 1344.

² See *National Recreation Survey* (Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, *Study Report* No. 19—Washington, 1962); *Prospective Demand for Outdoor Recreation* (Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, *Study Report* No. 26—Washington, 1962); *Fort Snelling*, 46–52 (Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Commission, *Report* No. 15—St. Paul, 1965).

hours, of a growing, restless population, of more and more money being spent upon various forms of amusement and education.

The best documentation, however, is in your own experience, which I am sure is the same as mine. Visit Mount Vernon, Colonial Williamsburg, Independence Hall, Boston—the crowds speak for themselves. Nor is this interest limited to national history. In the spring of 1965 our Minnesota Historical Society opened to the public the home of Alexander Ramsey, Minnesota's first territorial and second state governor. Within the first five months over 14,000 visitors had found their way to this house for the sole purpose of seeing the home and its furnishings. There are no picnic tables or other facilities; this is a historic site, pure and simple.

As a recreational pursuit history represents an important economic asset. It stimulates local and state economies by attracting visitors who frequently buy fuel and services for their cars, food, lodging and other merchandise. In this light history and historic sites are of interest to every legislator in the country.

THIS, THEN, is the background for understanding the inclusion of history in the list of resources to benefit under the Minnesota Omnibus Natural Resources and Recreation Act of 1963. The stated purpose of this law was to assure present and future generations recreational opportunities and to promote and stimulate the vital tourist industry in our state.

The approach taken was twofold. First, the law was designed to provide new funds for resource preservation and development. It added a one-cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes to raise some three and three-quarter million dollars every year. From the beginning history shared in the proceeds. The first appropriations, made biennially, included \$80,000 to the Minnesota Historical Society with which to finance a modest historic sites program.

Of equal importance was the law's emphasis upon the need for planning. At the time of its passage our legislature took the unique step of creating a legislative commission to analyze the problem and prepare a blueprint for future appropriations from the monies raised by the cigarette tax. Never before had such responsibility for resource planning been assumed as part of the legislative role, but a similar step has since been taken by at least one other state.

The first goal of the commission was to inventory our resources, working with interested agencies in the state and establishing criteria. Among other things this meant that historic sites of state-wide significance must be identified—a task which would have been impossible without the help of the Minnesota Historical Society. At the commission's request the society made a selection from among the many historic sites in Minnesota, indicating those which in its judgment deserved state support. This included more than just a listing of names. Not only was each site studied for its historic importance, but its ownership, its accessibility, and its degree of preservation were taken into consideration. A priority of importance was assigned to each site; an estimate was made of the dollars and cents needed to acquire, restore, and preserve; and this was balanced against anticipated visitor attendance and economic benefits. Cases in which traditional forms of recreational management came into conflict with the proper development of historical values were documented.³

The site which received number one priority was Fort Snelling. It served as the cradle for the settlement of our state and is now located in the heart of Minnesota's largest center of population. A newly established state park takes in the grounds

³ Three reports dealing with historic sites have to date been published by the commission. They are: *An Historic Sites Program for Minnesota* (No. 2); *An Archaeology Program for Minnesota* (No. 5); *Fort Snelling* (No. 15).

of the original fort and a large area adjoining them. Studies showed that nearly a million people—a quarter of them from outside Minnesota—could be expected to visit the fort in 1976 if the original buildings were reconstructed and the site restored to reflect its appearance in the 1830s when it served as the nation's far northwestern outpost. Such a restoration project has long been talked about in Minnesota.⁴

A coherent and careful plan for historic site preservation and development was thus presented to the 1965 session of our legislature. The result was an impressive record of legislation. The initial two-year appropriation of \$80,000 for historic sites was increased to \$235,704 for the 1965–67 biennium. Another \$200,000 was appropriated to finance the first phase of the restoration of Fort Snelling. Further, a sum of \$79,500 was set aside for archaeology—the first such state-supported program in the history of Minnesota.⁵

Legislation was also enacted to protect historic sites of state-wide significance which may be threatened with destruction. The Minnesota Historic Sites Act of 1965 established a registry of eighty-five “state historic sites,” divided into categories according to ownership. It provided that no state agency or subdivision may take action which might impair the historic value of sites located upon public land without prior approval by the Minnesota Historical Society or—in the case of state parks—by the conservation department.⁶

ANOTHER ASPECT of the Minnesota program for resource development which deserves particular mention is the incentive it provides for action by counties and

local governments. By setting aside a quarter of a million dollars to share equally with counties the costs of recreational planning, Minnesota has triggered almost unanimous county action along these lines. The state grants are tied directly to a federal grant program for planning—the Housing and Home Finance Agency's “701” program. This gives counties and local units of government at least two dollars of every three spent for planning. Depressed areas receive an even greater ratio. The state has also earmarked a million dollars from the cigarette tax monies to help local governments carry their share in the cost of recreational projects receiving federal grants.⁷

This brings into focus the parallel in philosophy between the Minnesota approach and that of the federal government as embodied in many of its recently enacted grant programs. Both emphasize planning and both seek to encourage local communities to assume responsibilities in the area of resource development. When looking at Minnesota's program and the requirements of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund program, one is reminded of the old debate over the chicken and the egg. Minnesota's approach became law in 1963; the Land and Water Act was not passed until late in 1964. Both are measures for financing; both programs are built around planning. The federal plan was not patterned after Minnesota's nor was Minnesota's formulated in anticipation of federal laws. But it cannot be said that the similarity is strictly coincidental. They are similar because both reflect the only intelligent and responsible approach to the investing of the taxpayers' dollars.

Other states have not all taken the same course toward natural and recreational resource planning as we have in Minnesota. But with more and more federal grants contingent on planning, counties and municipalities across the nation have been or will be preparing blueprints for the de-

⁴For the history of earlier proposals, see Russell W. Fridley, “Fort Snelling From Military Post to Historic Site,” in *Minnesota History*, 35:178–192 (December, 1956).

⁵Minnesota, *Session Laws*, 1965, p. 1286, 1287.

⁶Minnesota, *Session Laws*, 1965, p. 1186–1195.

⁷Minnesota, *Session Laws*, 1965, p. 1287–1290.

velopment of their resources. Historic sites can and should be identified in these. Whether or not they are will depend on the alertness and dedication of historical societies and other organizations devoted to the preservation of our past. If history is going to receive its share of available money, such groups must be willing to work with and for their local planning commission, county board, or state agency.

Be it from "701" planning funds, open space funds for land acquisition, land and

water conservation funds, economic opportunities funds for training personnel, or still other sources, there will be in the coming years unparalleled opportunities for the preservation and interpretation of history. Success in making the most of these depends on historical organizations. The record in Minnesota is the product of hard work by the Minnesota Historical Society in demonstrating to the policy makers and budget makers that it is attuned to the expanding role of history.

A Pioneer's Suggestion for Resource Planning

THE FOLLOWING letter, dated at Virginia City, Montana, on January 10, 1864, is among the Ignatius Donnelly Papers in the Minnesota Historical Society. Its writer, James Fergus, was an energetic Northwest pioneer, who in the 1850s founded two Minnesota towns (Little Falls and Fergus Falls) and in 1862 moved on to Montana, where he spent the remainder of his life and gave his name to a county. As a friend and former constituent of Donnelly—then a Minnesota congressman—he made a suggestion that shows him to have looked to the future with a thoughtfulness unusual for the time and place:

If Congress takes any steps to Extinguish the Indian Tittle to the Mining lands in Montana, I suggest that—[number unspecified] thousand acres containing both Mountain & Valley, timber & grazing in some portion of our Territory near the route of one of the projected overland railways and supposed to contain no Mineral, be set apart for the purpose at some future day of being used as a great National game park in which to collect a remnant of the Buffalo, Moose Elk Bear Dear Mountain Sheep Antelope Beaver &c that now inhabit the plains and Mountains but which at the present rate of destruction must soon pass away. Our frontier Men and Miners are a destructive race. They cut down Kill and destroy, the[y] seldom plant a tree or even let one grow however ornamental or

useful if it is in their way, or of saving the doe when in fawn, all belongs to the Indian or Uncle Sam, and is common property. So wherever the white man appears game soon disappears[.] Large game of all kinds (Except Buffalo) are hanging at all our Butchers stalls is peddled in our streets in waggon loads Hunters Ranche Men frontier Miners, trapper all live on it. No wonder the Indian finds fault, as he considers the wild game his own property.

But to return to our game Park, won't future generations thank us—this generation—for our wise fore thought, besides if well Managed such a park would soon pay its own Expenses from the increase of the Animals. Even now a good Buffalo or Moose stake would bring a good price in the Eastern Cities. As it becomes scarce it would be more highly Prized. The suggestion is Novel, but I think pract[ic]able if properly Managed. The land should be reserved when treated for from the Indians and the animals collected and the land fenced at Some future time.





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