

GREETINGS FROM A NEIGHBOR

An Address to the Pennsylvania Historical Association, April 28,
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TO this memorable meeting I bring the greeting of the New York State Historical Association. Indeed, at the order of your committee I am not to content myself with conveying its salutations and good will, but I am to present a summary sketch of its structure, working policies and ideals, tricked out with some counsel as to your own incipient enterprise. In this, I well know that I must walk a wary course between surrounding pitfalls. A didactic lecture ill befits the dinner table, especially when the experience of the lecturer has been brief and narrow, and his audience is dotted here and there with famous experts. Nevertheless, I note that you have struck an attitude of courteous and patient tolerance; you have, in fact, assured me of your eagerness for testimony no matter whence it comes. Thus heartened, I venture, out of boldness or of innocence, to labor a few obvious truths or doubtful opinions as I tell you what we have tried to do in our career of thirty-four years across the border.

The launching of the Pennsylvania Historical Association is an exciting matter to all historically-minded people. State associations have meant much in our history and its cultivation; state history is the meat of our experience. Most important steps in American progress have been worked out in the states rather than in the federal capital. Until recently, at least, the community which touched the individual with its rules of life was chiefly the state community. There the public will has registered itself on the rights and obligations of property, on public safety, on education, on the organization of business enterprise, on the arteries of travel, on recreation, on its facilities and its proprieties. Sections within the state have had their differences in tastes and interests, but these can be traced, oftentimes, most clearly in their represen-

tations to state government. In our political system federal action flows only from the compromise achieved among state representations, so that our national history is but an amalgam of state histories. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania ranks with considerable nations, not with provinces, in the quantities of people and of wealth involved and in its cultural impact on the world. Certainly an association which effectively encourages its study and by its overlapping influence brings into coöperation the many sympathetic agencies within its borders is of the highest public usefulness.

An historical association has three functions. First, though not the most important, is the purely social function. Sociologists declare that the attraction which holds groups together is a "consciousness of kind" and that like-minded men and women are more comfortable and efficient in the company of each other. Like most sociological "laws," this simply puts plain common sense upon a sound inductive basis; it has been realized for a long time that birds of a feather flock together. When travel was difficult, slow and dangerous we were confined to the appropriate chance contacts of the neighborhood. But as civilization advanced and brought with it the facilities of gathering, many opportunities for cultural coöperation were organized, somewhat in imitation of the Old World, in county, state and nation. Every man, to live fully, must have at least one strong enthusiasm, preferably more than one. Societies provide the scheme by which such enthusiasms may be nourished by mutual expression. The mere meeting has a value in enriching life. Indeed, imaginative meeting has its value too. If a solitary member is aware that here and there over a large area are hundreds who stand spiritually shoulder to shoulder with him in a common cause, who share his own desires, and who have signalized the common interest by formally adhering to the corporate enterprise, how suddenly and how effectively it breaks down the lonely isolation of his unrelated life! The comfort and inspiration have a mathematical ratio. If to hundreds are added thousands, the spiritual value of association is by so much increased. Every such organization should seek the largest practical scale.

The New York State Historical Association is not exactly frivolous, but neither is it ascetic. Brass bands and drums and pipers have enlivened our pilgrimages and our garden parties. We real-

ize, too, that history is to be looked for in more than books and monuments. A variety of pageants, the first American comedy, and a rare old opera have been specially produced to entertain as well as instruct us at our annual meetings. The elegant festivity which I perceive on this occasion is evidence that your meetings will not be too severe in atmosphere.

Second, is the impulse which an association gives to scholarship. The casual conversation of the meeting is an incalculable good. But it is the program which is the organized market of ideas here purveyed, and which is more or less eagerly received, usually without coercion and without price. Not only does this mutual contribution stimulate production but it makes it more responsible. It is one thing to sit by your fire and tell unlearned neighbors what you think, or to lecture to docile classes which must take what you say for all the truth they have. It is quite another thing to face in formal conference your peers, who possess a critical competence based upon studies not dissimilar to yours, in order to convince them of the facts or the opinions which you have systematically developed. To the will to give, as well as to get, the program offers an objective. Study, reflection, and artistic and effective presentation are pointed to a definite end; that which *might* be done, *is* done.

There are many themes appropriate to a state society which transcend the purview of a town society, a county society, or a sectional society, however valuable these may be in cultivating the tradition of the local hearthstone. However, in a vigorous state association the memory of the locality becomes related to the memory of the whole. To advance this element in this socialized education, it seems to me obvious beyond the necessity of argument that a state association should meet in the various localities by a rough rotation and that as part of the recurring program each locality should tell its story, or convenient portions of it, in relation to the developing civilization of the state. I say this in full knowledge that such practice is the exception and not the rule.

The state association may also formally recognize and permit distinguished contributions to state historiography. Ours in New York is empowered by its constitution to award twelve honorary fellowships, but not more than two in any year. Certainly the

outstanding state historian or local historian is entitled to his share of praise.

A society without a local habitation lacks a focal point, is not easily envisaged as a factor in the culture of the state, and is generally less effectively administered. A new state association such as this, if I may presume to offer counsel, should set about immediately to raise funds for headquarters. Its location may depend on circumstances; that is not primarily important, for the mails run everywhere, though if circumstances favor, it is clearly better to place it centrally or near some shrine of historical devotion. Were there one all-embracing state university it might be placed within its precincts. The advantages of this would be that the university might donate space rent free and that there would be a coterie of local enthusiasts in the history department of the institution; the disadvantages would be that it might seem too academic and professional for the comfort of the large lay membership in the association, that the association might enjoy less individualized status in public esteem, and that the historical staffs of other colleges might feel less responsibility if not less interest in its expansion and prosperity. To me the disadvantages seem more impressive, though such an arrangement might form a necessary makeshift.

The headquarters of a state historical association should be as spacious and as stately as funds permit, but it seems a needless cost to make it monumental. Not necessarily a place of stated meeting, it should serve two purposes: as a center of administration and, if possible, as a roadside museum for those who pass. To serve this latter purpose, charm is more important than impressiveness. A great library, a great gallery of art, a great depository of historical remains—these are appropriate to large cities. If the state does not possess such institutions, then the state historical association has a clear call to fill this vacuum with an appropriate culture center, all in a grand manner with a noble edifice, with a competent staff caring for and exploiting collections, which scholars would come far to consult. Such an enterprise would require millions of dollars and enormous labor. If institutions now exist potentially adequate to fill this need it would be folly to duplicate them or to impoverish them by useless competition. It seems to me that they do exist in this state. A majestic institution of this kind is no necessary part of a vigorous and useful

state historical association. If million dollar checks came flying in as free gifts I would use them otherwise. On the other hand, if immense sums came, earmarked insistently for such an institution, I would build the greatest building in the world. Such a prospect, however, is remote indeed.

An association, whatever its housing, has a wider province than the stimulation of its own membership to continuous interest and to scholarship. Its third, and perhaps its chief function, is public service. Foregoing a great culture center, what service may it yet perform in this concern? If it is housed along a main route of travel, especially if in a small community, its headquarters will soon serve as we have intimated, and at no prohibitive cost, as a roadside museum. Such a function would have been impossible, perhaps, twenty-five years ago. Then the passing stranger was an event; today he is a continuing condition. Despite the economic depression of the past three years there are still many millions of motor cars upon our highways, a great number of them filled, especially in summer time, with intelligent, inquisitive Americans out to see and learn. With traveling somewhat diminished for the time being, Headquarters House of the New York State Historical Association, situated in remote Ticonderoga still welcomes 10,000 tourists each year and sends them on instructed in some slight degree as to the great tradition of the state. If we charged for admission, we would undoubtedly cut down the number and our educational efficiency to a considerable extent. Without one penny to increase by purchase our humble store of historical materials, we find them constantly being increased by generous gifts and loans. The possibilities of loans will perhaps become the more apparent when I tell you that within the past three months the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City has placed with us on permanent loan forty pieces of fine old American furnishings, and that the Common Council of the city of Albany has similarly entrusted us with thirty-eight large portraits of the governors of the state from George Clinton in the eighteenth century to Charles Evans Hughes in the twentieth; we plan this summer a special loan exhibition of fifty old lithographic prints illustrating the work and sport of northern New York, some of them priceless and all carefully chosen from the greatest collection of lithographs in this country. As some family history at any given moment is

in a sense beginning through the rise of ambitious youth from poverty to wealth, prominence and display, so some other family history is always ending through the failure of direct or interested descendants, and such a family may well desire that its treasures or its typical Americana be permanently placed in appropriate and decorous surroundings for the public instruction of succeeding generations. We can certify that only energy, imagination and diplomacy are necessary to build up a respectable roadside museum once an adequate building is provided and this without attracting one book or picture or one piece of furniture which would have gone to a local society museum.

This is no time to discuss the ideals and technique of museology, nor am I competent to discuss them. But I may say in this connection, and tritely, that the effectiveness of such a museum depends less on the materials displayed than on the way they are displayed. An historical museum is not a cemetery of testamentary relics or a loot-heap of unrelated curiosities; it is the living past teaching through its own physical evidences interpreted by scholarship. What is needed first is personal vision and enterprise.

Our own association is highly fortunate in its director, schooled and trained, it happens, in Pennsylvania. When Mr. Julian P. Boyd arrived at Headquarters House a year ago he found a meager pile of household implements in a corner of what was known as the attic. To the unimaginative mind it must have seemed quite trifling. But when he saw a shuttle, he saw a vanished industry; when he saw a cheese-press, he saw a mode of self-sufficient family life, now nearly obsolete but happily persisting in its moral influence. He made an exhibition out of a pile of junk, placed a common mortar and pestle as though they were important, making them a concentration point, and by a long descriptive lecture card expounded the essentials of old "physick and chirurgery." Visitors stopped, taking a comfortable chair beside the little reading desk whereon the card was placed, and whatever their day's plans, read it through. Urged by those impressed with this success, he printed similar cards for other group exhibits and sent them free to every historical museum in the state, a service which he now continues. I rehearse this merely as a practical illustration of how effective museum service can be rendered with little but an idea, a fact familiar to every real curator in the world.

A museum, as I have previously argued, is but a small part of the public service which a state historical association can render. It should be an agency of publication. There may be other agencies established to edit and produce documentary material; if so, much still remains to be done. First, is a periodical to include papers read at meetings, as well as other contributions, and to call appropriate attention to historical activities in every part of the state. Nothing is more stimulating to local groups or societies than to know what other local groups are doing; nothing is more valuable to turn the energies of hereditary-patriotic societies and other organizations into useful historical channels than appreciative notices of achievements in this general interest. The magazine is so manifestly necessary that it needs no advocate. There are more elaborate studies that cannot be compressed into papers to be read or articles for a periodical. Publishers with heavy costs of overhead administration cannot be persuaded to issue books, which, however high their merit, can find but a narrow market. A state association should seek out such appropriate manuscripts, and urge the writing of others. It should then publish them at low cost for their membership and such others as may be interested. But unless an association can afford to give away its books, it must insist on readability as well as scholarship. During the past four months the New York State Historical Association has published two such books, with some aid from the authors, one a monograph on the ratification of the Federal Constitution in the state, by a scholar now in the Department of State in Washington, and the other on the struggles between the Whigs and Tories along the old New York frontier, by a Broadway merchant. We have one manuscript ready and we have persuaded competent authors to undertake two others. The association supplies the editorial counsel and coöperation, solicits further financial aid, and finds a buying public, or at least a necessary nucleus, within its membership.

Highly valuing this series of individual books, our hopes and interests are still more earnestly applied to a more ambitious enterprise. I need not tell this company that state histories are too often more impressive for their bulk than for their substance. Commercial schemes of publishers not always conscientious, their thin perfunctory narratives swiftly gleaned from other histories

are oftentimes merely introductory to several volumes of biographical praise of subscribing local bankers, politicians, county lawyers, who thus acquire dubious literary monuments by purchase. Now and then a single scholar like Dr. Folwell aided very materially by Dr. Buck produces a full-length history of a state. In Illinois, a state university staff has published a coöperative work which is the admiration of all historically-minded Americans. It was that which inspired us to emulation. We have projected a ten-volume History of the State of New York to be written by seventy-five of our members and this week we welcomed the first two volumes from the printer. We have lavished no little care upon this project, but its quality cannot be discussed till competent critics have pronounced upon it. The enterprise, it is only just to say, has depended in large part upon the generous coöperation of the Columbia University Press, but the sale of six hundred sets so far in these depressing times is, we think, a pledge of success. More than a third of these have been to our own members, and none shall rest until this work has been adequately brought to the attention of the public.

If it were a proper undertaking for our association to write the history of our state, a similar enterprise, I think, could be considered by your own. Counting on your charity, I may say that your need is greater than ours. We have histories by William Smith, Jabez D. Hammond and D. S. Alexander written long before our time, and with somewhat Shavian impertinence I may state my own opinion that you do not have any as good as these. In fact, I know few states comparable at all with Pennsylvania in a rich past which are so much in need of a general history from the times of Penn to those of Pinchot. I know you will forgive my frankness, but your very invitation was a vote of tolerance to such gratuitous advice as I might proffer.

There are other phases of this function of public service more important, it may be, than any I have mentioned. Coöperative histories are seldom wholly satisfactory. However good the editorial plan, contributing scholars have each their private crochets and most, however well determined, fail to meet it perfectly. But coöperation in seeking and listing the resources of historiography is always good as far as it goes. Our association, well aware that it probably can never build up a great culture center in Head-

quarters House at Ticonderoga, is determined to make it a building of historical service. From it now proceeds, at a painfully slow pace because of present lack of funds, a survey of historical manuscripts in every part of our state outside the great repositories in New York City. In one year Mr. Boyd has accomplished much in his spare time, but his achievement so far has been to show by well-chosen samples what can and what should be done. He has catalogued the records of several steamboat companies and when this small department of his files comes to completeness, any scholar concerned with the history of transportation can, by writing to him, learn much of what materials on steamboat traffic in New York is available and where it may be found. Mr. Boyd has recently begun a similar study of college archives in the state. Such samples will, we hope, attract sufficient funds to make possible a whole survey proceeding on lines worked out by Dr. Cappon in Virginia. The advantage of an association in such an undertaking is that it has a state-wide prestige and can count on help and hospitality from committees of its local members. There are a hundred phases of this problem that no doubt have long since impressed you here in Pennsylvania. For example, I am told that it would be impossible at present to write the legal history of this Commonwealth because its very materials are comparatively unknown. History is not what happened, but what we know happened, that is, what has left an available record. To find and list these records is a public service of the first importance.

There are, and have been, certain factors in American life that imperil historical records. Our individualist theory of politics has left our governments unarmed with sufficient coercive authority to require the proper care of local archives. Private records have been constantly endangered by our habit of building wooden structures rather than structures of masonry, with resultant loss by fire. The mobility of our population in this land of beckoning opportunity has made the destruction of family or business records a general temptation. In recent years, in America as well as elsewhere, the urban trend has aggravated it. Where is there space for family records—to say nothing of hereditary furniture—in a three room apartment? This is a nation of individuals, not of families in the European sense. Cheap land and other western opportunities long invited youth to leave home as

soon as possible. Absence of traditional affection for a place has made us less historically-minded than we should be. A state historical association can do much in spreading the mood of prizing records whether it acquires them or not.

Historic buildings themselves in this dynamic age are threatened on every side. A state historical association with its hold on public opinion can do much to rescue them, much to stir the understanding and the will of localities, of private patrons, and of the state itself. They must be preserved for our children and our children's children to look upon and know better the old life of America. A state association naturally concerns itself, with multiform coöperation, in the marking of historic sites. May I take this opportunity to compliment your state upon its own roadside markers. "Let us remember," says Dr. Flick in a notable paper on "Our Buried Treasures," which recently appeared in *New York History*, "that ancestors are not all in heaven. We too are ancestors! We have an obligation to our descendants. It is our duty to bequeath to them the largest possible knowledge of our civilization and all we can ascertain about our own heritage. This will enable them to perpetuate the things most worthwhile in our age, to modify and improve them, and thus to fashion their civilization on a higher and finer level than ours."

In organizing to achieve these lofty purposes the form and scheme are clearly of great importance. These are the obvious alternatives, the unitary and the federative plans. You have chosen wisely, I believe, in taking the former, a society of individuals and not a society of societies. The latter would appear almost impossible to finance, since the local historical societies are usually without adequate funds, and some of them without vitality. It is for you, in many cases, to energize them rather than to feed upon their energies. And the best way is obviously to enroll as many of their members on your own list as will pay your modest fee. This is not piracy, but lawful trade in enthusiasm through the medium of individuals who bring profit to both parties. Far from being a competitor with the existing societies, you are their best friend. The New York State Historical Association is organized, as many of you know, upon this plan and a large proportion of our members preserve this double loyalty, to the advantage of all. Federation has been projected from time to time, but it

has seemed that the hundred societies, more or less, were so different in types and circumstances that formal federalization would be difficult and of doubtful value. At the same time, it has been realized that each could learn from others and since their common interests after all outnumbered their peculiarities, none could wisely live to itself alone. Most of them have sought the counsel of the State Historian, an officer of government in New York, but this has meant instruction rather than coöperation, and has oftentimes been limited to the contact of chance visits. Gradually, by the logic of its growth, our association has been supplying the factor of spiritual integration.

Our circumstances are much like yours. The ancient, dignified, richly endowed and furnished New York Historical Society corresponds in large public usefulness with the great society in Philadelphia—a prized resort of scholarship, somewhat local in its constituency, sustained in considerable measure upon the hereditary principle. Our Buffalo and Rochester societies serve the west as does yours in Pittsburgh; old useful institutions at Syracuse, Utica, Schenectady and Albany correspond to yours in Lancaster, Reading, Wilkes-Barre, and elsewhere. The officials of these venerable and vigorous organizations have generously shared their energies with the state association, young and poor though it is. Instead of jealousy, suspicion, or the haughtiness of prestige, they have offered the most cordial and valuable support, clearly recognizing the value to themselves of such collaboration.

Should a state association seek the patronage of the state as a basis for its work? In our judgment, the amateur spirit and the sense of independence, is better sustained without relying upon such subvention, though we would gladly take and use to good advantage any appropriation which the state at any time might see fit to make. To solicit such aid as a necessity might, we fear, throw us into party politics and deeply affect, perhaps, what we might wish to print, as well as subject us to the uncertainties of state budgets. The American Historical Association has for many years received aid from the federal government, at least \$8,000 annually, for its printing program; this year it finds itself unmentioned in the schedules, with considerable embarrassment. It is in accordance with the old American spirit that social action should proceed from voluntary effort without the taxpayer's bounty;

however unfashionable this theory has recently become, we find ourselves more comfortable in still observing it.

Let me say a word about the amateur spirit in another sense. Less than ten per cent of our two thousand members get their living by the promotion of historical interests. To most, it is a cherished avocation, a lively personal interest to employ spare moments. On the programs of our three-day annual meetings the professionals may show a higher proportion, but most of those who contribute papers are competent amateurs who work in history for its own delights. Academic caps and gowns are left at home, in spirit as well as in fact; in the association Professor John Doe becomes John Doe, Gentleman. If the professionals assumed an air of superiority, not only would they violate the fundamental contract of equal fraternity, but they would fly so hard in the face of facts that they would, I believe, soon be gently excluded as a nuisance. Beware of letting professors run the Pennsylvania Historical Association—at least as professors. At the same time the professors will in the nature of things supply many constructive ideas and will discharge some of the tasks of the association more effectively than could be expected from members of less experience.

All this glib advice, my friends, may arouse derision if not resentment. It may seem to be distilled from self-satisfaction. We actually proceed in our neighboring state with far more humility than we seem to indicate. The advice I have given, you will recall, is at the earnest order of your committee. If you find any part of our plan worth following we shall, of course, be gratified, but not less so if you profit by our failures and mistakes. In another decade or in less time, you will be coming at our invitation to give us the profit of your own experience, to tell us how with intelligent originality you have surmounted obstacles that may still limit our service. The mutuality of this testimony will, I know, mean much to our associations; certainly we shall learn much from you. You have seized what was perhaps the greatest opportunity for this sort of historical service that remained in America. Leadership is indicated in your circumstances. Here has been everything but organization. At this meeting, as I understand it, that is effected and secured. That you should fail of reasonable success is as unthinkable as it would be calamitous,—we feel

assured of the outcome; that you should fail in taking your place in the vanguard of all those promoting historical studies in the states and the localities of this country would be contrary to all expectation. When I recall the grand tradition of Pennsylvania and survey the personnel here banded to develop it, the last doubt vanishes. We are present, ladies and gentlemen, at a great event in the history of history in the United States. All of us, and certainly none more than myself, will hold a grateful memory through our lives, grateful that fate has permitted us to watch and to take a part in the launching of an enterprise of large and lasting public usefulness.