

THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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ESTABLISHED in 1913, under Governor Tener, the Pennsylvania Historical Commission is now functioning under its seventh administration, with ever-increasing interest and results. It has reshaped and revised its objectives in a desire to make the state history conscious, to create a realization that all social and economic progress develops more easily and normally as it is demonstrated to be the outgrowth of historical precedents, a logical development from older conditions that were considered radical in their day, but of which the present day conservative is frequently proud.

With this objective definitely in mind, the Commission plans to foster the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies and by direct coöperation with these local societies and those with a state-wide scope, secure a state-wide program towards this end. It is hoped that in the near future the Commission will serve as the clearing house for all Pennsylvania historical interests.

The most effective phase of its work in arousing public response and local coöperation has been its so-called "out-door" work, the marking of historic places and the archaeological exploration of prehistoric and historic sites, with a view to ascertain the story left in the ground by long past events and persons. This phase has been largely associated with the Commission's participation in large historical celebrations.

The archaeological work has brought to light much information on the life and customs of the various tribes in this section of the Eastern woodland culture, of which very little was known before the Commission took up the work and also, through the excavations at Pennsbury, William Penn's manor house on the Delaware, has ascertained fundamental facts which will help in the restoration of this shrine of Pennsylvania. In this, the Works Progress Administration is coöperating with the Commission and

work is being conducted in seven counties under the Commission's supervision. Application has also been made for a project to explore and restore the early French and English forts in Erie, Mercer, Venango, Crawford and Warren counties.

Similar to the investigations at Pennsbury will be those on Tinicum Island preliminary to the Tercentenary of the Landing of the Swedes in 1638, when Pennsylvania history began with the establishment of the first courts of law, the first schools and the first capitol in what is now Pennsylvania.

In order to facilitate the work on this celebration, and the preparations for Pennsylvania's part in the national celebration of the 150th anniversary of the ratification of the Federal Constitution, under authorization of the General Assembly in Special Session, which made appropriations for these events, the Commission is opening a branch office in Philadelphia. The Commission prepared an outstanding proclamation to submit to the Governor, calling for a suitable commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the signing of the Constitution. Copies of the Proclamation as issued by the Governor are to be widely distributed. Under authorization of the General Assembly, the Commission will investigate and report to the next legislature upon the probable area and cost necessary to acquire the Brandywine Battlefield.

In accordance with its state-wide program of restoring and preserving historical landmarks, the Commission with the aid of the special fund made available during the last regular session of the General Assembly, is rehabilitating and restoring the famous Great House at Old Economy, near Ambridge. Many other historic properties have been placed in the custody of the Commission, such as Fort Augusta at Sunbury; Pennsbury on the Delaware; Cornwall Iron Furnace, in operation since 1742; and Drake Oil Park near Titusville.

The publications of the Commission are limited by the size of the appropriations and by official dictum. Plans made repeatedly for publication of important manuscripts have been curtailed frequently. Of the publications to date, a number are still available for distribution to educators, historians, and state officials. Expansion of this very important phase of its work is one of the expected objectives of the present Commission.

Direct historical research is another of these objectives, through which the economic and social development of the state will be

studied to explain the present conditions. Through dependable, solid leadership in its field and through real, vital initiative, the Commission plans to "sell" the usefulness of historical work to the people of Pennsylvania and thereby promote its preservation and study.

The present Commission includes Frank W. Melvin, Philadelphia, chairman; Miss M. Atherton Leach, Philadelphia; Paul W. Gates, Bucknell University, Lewisburg;¹ Bruce A. Hunt, Williamsport; Ross Pier Wright, Erie and Lester K. Ade, Superintendent of Public Instruction, *ex officio*.

¹ Resigned because of change of position to the Department of History, Cornell University. A successor has not yet been appointed.