THE IMPORTANCE OF STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

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The Pennsylvania Historical Association is to be complimented upon its educational program. For years leaders of Pennsylvania thought have appreciated the importance of utilizing larger portions of our Pennsylvania historical heritage in our public educational program. Your Association is doing something about it. The inauguration of a special department in your quarterly publication, Pennsylvania History, devoted to the interests of teachers in the public schools desiring to use local and state history in their classrooms, is a most commendable move forward. The articles contained in it have been helpful. They are especially so, because they are written by and for the school people themselves.

It is gratifying to note that at your annual meetings separate sections are devoted to the same problems, and that again those who have had practical experience in the field of instruction are to relate their experiences and methods for the benefit of other teachers. This is educational work of the utmost value. It indicates a commendable desire of the Association to tie in its own program with the larger fabric of our entire state-wide educational program as administered under our Department of Public Instruction at Harrisburg.

The cooperation of the Association with the Pennsylvania Historical Commission in arranging regional conferences to consider problems of Pennsylvania history is another praiseworthy phase

1 Read at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, held at Williamsport, October 28, 1938.
of your work. Bucknell University and Pennsylvania State College were pioneers in this effort. It is our hope that they will continue sponsorship of these regional meetings and that others of our educational institutions will see fit to follow this example. It is our belief that these regional gatherings may be of the utmost value in forwarding a state-wide program of Pennsylvania history.

**The Growing Consciousness of Pennsylvania History**

It is quite appropriate that your Association should be found adopting this progressive point of view and undertaking so many worth-while projects. It is the feeling of all of us who have the good fortune to be able to view developments in this great Commonwealth from the vantage point of Harrisburg, looking out over Pennsylvania as a whole, that there is under way a rapidly expanding interest in Pennsylvania history. We are becoming more conscious of the importance of our rich historical background. We are endeavoring, in various ways, to translate this consciousness into a new and richer historical program both locally and on a state-wide basis.

It is possible to observe at least four major evidences of such a trend. In the first place, the organization and rapid growth of your own Association over a period of hardly more than half a decade is an indication of this interest. The national acceptance of your publication, *Pennsylvania History*, as one of the leading historical journals of the nation strengthens this belief that we are ready to go forward in the writing and circulating of Pennsylvania history.

The Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies has experienced a rebirth of activity. Organized in 1905, it is the oldest state-wide historical organization in Pennsylvania. It is a happy fact that there is such a close relationship evident between it and your Association. The Federation has received the sponsorship of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, which has provided it with headquarters in the Commission Office and allowed the Commission historian to serve as the Federation secretary. This has been done because of the belief that, properly coordinated, stimulated, and directed, the activities of our many local historical societies could contribute richly to a Pennsylvania historical program. We believe that this idea is already bearing fruit in the
new life and activity manifest in the Federation under the leadership of Mr. Bruce A. Hunt, as president, and Mr. S. K. Stevens as secretary.

A third evidence of new historical life in our great Commonwealth is to be found in the expanding educational functions of our local societies, both within and without the Federation. From every section of the Commonwealth comes news of the increasing membership of old societies, the revival of those formerly dormant, and the organization of new groups. Of especial importance is the educational work of these societies. Thousands of school children are visiting their museums and viewing the exhibits which tell the story of life as lived by our forebears. Several societies are beginning to turn attention to the production of historical maps and pamphlets dealing with local history which may be utilized in the classroom. Others encourage membership and participation in society activities upon the part of pupils of the secondary school level. In Westmoreland and Fayette counties, the historical society has aided in the development of local history clubs in the schools.

As a fourth and final indication of how Pennsylvania history is marching forward, we may point to the work of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission behind which we have placed every facility of the Department of Public Instruction. The Commission as organized under this Administration is the sixth to have functioned under the act creating this agency in 1913. Its able and energetic chairman, Major Frank W. Melvin, has helped to make it a most aggressive and progressive body. For the first time we have a professional historical program. The Commission has been supported by a generous appropriation of the General Assembly in excess of any previously received. It has been able to make use of the General State Authority program and of the WPA and NYA organizations and, through these instrumentalities, hundreds of dollars have been devoted to historical and archeological enterprises throughout the Commonwealth.

The Commission has developed many new services and expanded its former functions. It has made remarkable progress in developing a program for the preservation of our outstanding historic sites and shrines. The restorations at Pennsbury and Old Economy are so important as to be comparable to the much pub-
licized work at Williamsburg. Historical properties under Commonwealth control are being administered and developed on an efficient and extensive basis. The Commission has coöperated with the Bureau of Instruction in our Department in stimulating the interest of schools in the greater use of state and local history in the school program. It has published at least one major contribution to our state and national history in the study of the eighteenth century Pennsylvania iron industry, written by one of your leaders, Dr. Arthur C. Bining (*Pennsylvania Iron Manufacture in the Eighteenth Century*). In coöperation with the committee for the observance of the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Constitution of the United States and the Pennsylvania 300th Anniversary Commission, it has aided in placing in the schools valuable booklets on those phases of Commonwealth history. It has become a coördinating and integrating agency in Pennsylvania historical affairs, and as such its influence is felt today from one end of the Commonwealth to the other.

**Some Practical Values of State History**

All of this new activity has important educational implications which should not be ignored. Educationally, this expanding interest in state and local history is a very desirable trend and indicates a growing acceptance of certain sound principles. Three of these principles are worth our notice: First, it can be asserted with emphasis that there is a growing appreciation of the fact that the study of local problems, conditions, and history is the sound basis from which to approach the fuller understanding of our national life and problems. We are all familiar with the trend toward centralization in American affairs which has been characteristic of the twentieth century. All too frequently it has been maintained that this was a governmental phenomenon. It has not been solely political, however, for the trend toward political centralization followed the growing nationalization of our economic, social, and cultural life and institutions. The effort to achieve national and large scale enterprise has dominated virtually every phase of our existence in the first three decades of this century. It has been as true of education as of business and government.

This tendency toward a larger scale organization of our American institutions was natural and commendable, but it has now
reached the point where it begins to produce its own serious problems. Certainly, one great issue in our modern economic, social, and political life is how best to preserve the advantages of local understanding and initiative, and yet secure the largest possible national integration of administrative machinery for the efficient and intelligent solution of present problems. The so-called evils of bureaucracy are best avoided when the best possible balance is achieved between these two factors.

It is because of this fact that we are coming to place more and more importance upon the study of local, state and regional government, history and institutions. If we desire to solve our national problems, we must gain a better understanding of the local conditions which provide their background. The history of the locality in terms of social and economic development becomes, therefore, a subject of increasing importance. The Lebanon County Historical Society recently published a booklet on Recent Social and Economic Trends in Lebanon County. The key to successful state and national planning may well be found in a larger development of similar studies.

Such a procedure is consistent with sound modern educational theories regarding the teaching of the social studies. Educators everywhere are placing increased emphasis upon the analysis and understanding of the immediate environment of the pupil as the key to arousing interest and understanding in the larger concepts embodied in any social studies program. We recognize that it is sound educational practice to pass from the concrete to the abstract rather than to reverse the process. In the old days, in the teaching of history, for example, we did proceed from the abstract to the concrete by beginning the study of all history with the most ancient times. Today, we prefer to begin our study with the history of the immediate community and state, and proceed to build up from that to a comprehension of the larger problems of the nation and the world. That which is concrete and within the grasp of the pupil is presented first. Once fundamental appreciations are established and interests aroused, it is possible to generalize and to approach the study of those problems which are not within the environmental understanding of the pupil.

There is a third educational principle which the growth of interest in state and local history recognizes. Progressive students
of the social sciences have come to recognize a law of diminishing returns so far as history is concerned. Relatively speaking, those events which are most distant from our own way in point of time are of least value to us in understanding our present life and institutions. This is not true in any absolute and unvariable sense, but it is true as a general proposition. The study of the architecture of ancient Greece and Rome, for example, is of great importance to modern architecture, but the study of the ecclesiastical system, and the intricate dynastic and other rivalries of ancient and medieval times, have little of interest or value in terms of enlarging our comprehension of present-day civilization. While we may reach back into the past and pull out of our historical heritage those items of importance to the appreciation and comprehension of the present, we no longer follow slavishly the theory that the study of all history should follow a rigid chronology of the rise and fall of this and that civilization from ancient times to date.

A Place in the School Program

A careful study of these recent developments would be of much more value to the average product of our secondary schools than the study of colonial life. We are more concerned with finding out the why and wherefore of contemporary life, and in this endeavor we find that we do not have to reach too far back into the past for the whole story. It is probably true beyond contradiction, for example, that the complicated economic and social problems of modern America are, in the main, the result of changes in our historical evolution, the most important of which have taken place since about 1860.

It is interesting, in this connection, to note that a survey conducted by the Historical Commission among some two hundred teachers in schools selected for excellence in the social studies reveals that an over-whelming majority believe that any course dealing with Pennsylvania affairs should place considerable emphasis upon present-day problems. The study of such problems may well begin at home and be bolstered by constant references to the local scene. Why, it may be asked, should Philadelphia children be called upon to study a Federal Housing program without securing first-hand information as to housing conditions in their own city?
Why should they not consider the historical evolution of the city providing the background for those conditions? In a similar manner, the problems connected with soil erosion and its social and economic consequences may well be observed in many sections of rural Pennsylvania. A better comprehension of such matters will be acquired by a study of local and state conditions prior to plunging into an effort to understand the farm problem of the nation on a broad national basis.

In Pennsylvania we feel that we are abreast of the new currents in the social studies stream. We are distributing from the Department of Public Instruction to the schools of the Commonwealth a suggested new social studies program. The new plan is not the concoction of a few theorists in the Department, but has been prepared by the Committee on Social Studies after trial experimentally in several schools. It has received the benefit of constructive suggestion and criticism from such outstanding historians, as Charles A. Beard and Harry Elmer Barnes. Fundamentally, the new program is built around the concept that the social studies should serve to relate the individual to his environment and to integrate that immediate environment with the life of the state, the nation, and the world at large. It conceives of the social sciences as possessing a unified structure which cuts across the narrowing lines of former subject matter groupings, such as history or economics. The supreme objective of all social studies teaching becomes the better understanding of the civilization in which we live, with all of its varied areas of human experience.

It is our belief that this new program increases tremendously the need for the utilization of local and state history, government and kindred matters in the schools of the Commonwealth. If the educational principles which we have outlined previously are valid, they have immediate application in connection with this new program.

For example, the first area of human experience set up in the tentative chart of the new program is concerned with the protecting and improving of life and health. From the kindergarten to the senior high school level there is a progression in the study of this problem from the simple to its complicated expression. At every grade level, it is our belief that there will be found oppor-
portunity to draw upon studies of local history, government, and economic and social conditions. The study of the evolution of medical practice and of charitable and social agencies in any community would certainly provide rich material for illustrating and enriching many topics which would be touched upon in considering this major topic. Likewise, the history of public health, pure food and drugs and sanitary legislation in Pennsylvania would be a necessary part of any effort to approach the study of this problem on a national scale.

Such examples could be multiplied, and we wish that all who care to do so would examine the new chart of the social studies with this point of view in mind. It is our belief that it will contribute more to arousing an understanding of, and knowledge about our community and state life and history that was ever possible under the former approach to the social sciences. Rather than bringing Pennsylvania materials into the educational program during the colonial and Revolutionary periods of United States history, as has been so commonly the case in the former set-up, the tendency will be toward a greater emphasis upon social and economic developments of the present day. We feel that this will be of decided advantage and better equip the typical product of our schools to take part, as good citizens, in the complicated life of present-day Pennsylvania.

It is our belief further, and this point of view is supported by those who have experimented in the classroom, that the present challenge to the social studies from the charge that much of their subject matter is dull and dry will be met with an increased interest in those subjects. It is axiomatic that we are interested in the things which we understand. We understand most easily those things which are somewhat contemporary and immediate to our environment. It is more difficult to understand the social problems of eighteenth century Europe and the background of the French Revolution than it is to appreciate the nature of contemporary labor and social unrest. Consequently, it is a matter, of course, that interest will follow from the study of local and state history and conditions. The more possible it is to tie that history to the present, the greater will be the success in arousing pupil interest in the varied problems encountered in a social studies program.
A definite advantage to our modern society should be the result of such a program. We are interested today in developing citizenship and patriotism. An essential element of all good citizenship and all sound patriotism should be a loyalty to, and understanding of the community. It is not accidental perhaps that the totalitarian states of Europe place great emphasis upon developing loyalty to locality and to region as well as to the state. We do not wish to emulate those totalitarian states in any of their economic or political philosophy, but it may be possible that the preservation of our own democracy is to be achieved through an aroused consciousness of the importance of local government and institutions, and a loyalty to them as a part of a larger loyalty to our national ideals and traditions. The person who best understands the problems of his community and loyally participates in the varied activities of local government, business, and social life is apt to be the type of citizen who possesses the virtues essential to the maintenance of a sound body politic on a national basis.

More than that, it is reasonable to suppose that increased study of our local and state history and its problems will result in the accumulation of data and knowledge which will better enable us to build that better civilization which we so greatly desire for our country. As we know more of our local and state history we come better to understand our problems, political and otherwise. If we come to know, for instance, the background of present-day labor problems in Pennsylvania we are in a better position to understand and evaluate the problems of a national labor movement program. As we come to survey a so-called “backward” rural area in Pennsylvania and study its origins and present problems connected with its existence, we come to be more tolerant and understanding in our view of the national agrarian problem.

In addition, the facts which we establish through these studies of local conditions should enable us to establish, on a sound basis, national programs for social and economic betterment. It cannot fail to aid in achieving that ideal balance between local government and initiative and a broader administrative uniformity in general plans together with a program on a state and national scale which, as we have indicated earlier, is a pressing concern of our present day.
A Challenge to Education

We are faced, then, with powerful new forces which are on the march in Pennsylvania today. There is that interest in our state and local history gradually surging to the front; there is that recognition of the educational validity of such a movement; there is that opportunity to utilize this interest in a great state-wide educational program. Here, is a challenge presented to all those agencies within the Commonwealth which are in any position to act upon it. We need not be ashamed to admit that we have not met the challenge in its entirety. We should be ashamed to admit we are not concerned with endeavoring to meet it. Ten years from today we may be bitterly and rightly condemned if we have not accomplished much toward answering the challenge of today.

From the school survey made by the Historical Commission we have found that Pennsylvania teachers are ready to use local and state history to integrate it into a program which will utilize it in enlarging our understanding of national history and development. They do not want a single course in chronological Pennsylvania history forced upon them, and I wish to make that point very emphatic. They do desire assistance in adapting local and state history and government to the needs of the present social studies program. That aid we are duty bound to provide so far as our resources permit. We are happy to say that the Department of Public Instruction, in coöperation with the Historical Commission, is planning a long range attack upon this problem.

In that connection, the social studies committee of the Department has coöperated with the historian of the Historical Commission in outlining a program for the future. Summarized, this program envisions the preparation of pamphlets and stories for different school levels based upon Pennsylvania history. It seeks to encourage the use of the school journey to points of local historical interest and the use of local museum and other educational facilities. It plans the production of a manual on state history with practical guides to ways and means of utilizing state and local history in the new educational program. It will seek to coöperate with the Museum Extension of WPA, and to utilize Department and Commission facilities for the production of slides, moving pictures, maps, models, and other visual educational aids to an understanding of Commonwealth history.
CONCLUSION—A PLEA FOR COÖPERATION

Meeting this challenge, however, is not alone the burden of Harrisburg. We challenge your Association to extend further and expand its educational program. You have made a splendid beginning and we wish its continuance. We challenge the historical societies to study modern education trends and to adjust and modernize their programs to provide for full coöperation with all local educational agencies. We are ready to help them through the Historical Commission.

To the teachers of the social studies in the Commonwealth we direct an especial appeal. You are the persons upon whom will rest the final responsibility for the success or failure of any educational program. You can be provided with materials and suggestions and every facility for using local and state history in your schoolrooms. You cannot be provided, however, with a ready-made, pre-fabricated structure which will leave nothing for the individual teacher to do except to put it together. Teachers, themselves, must study individually the problem of how best to adapt the study of local and state history to school needs.

Much of the material for such study must come from the effort of teachers and pupils. It would be a mistake to place in your hands complete textbooks of local and state history, even if it were possible. The true teacher and educator will follow general suggestions and use the classroom and its projects to build the materials of instruction. That is an educational principle with which no Pennsylvania teacher should today be unfamiliar.

We are confident that in achieving the desirable objective of recognizing the importance of state and local history in our educational program we are on the road to real accomplishments.