AN EDUCATIONAL TOUR OF THE STATE CAPITAL

BY GEORGE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Learning by participation is fast being recognized as an important part of democratic education. Utilizing this process, a group of seniors and faculty members from George School, a coeducational boarding school in Bucks County, recently visited the state capitol at Harrisburg. Previous senior classes of this school had made similar trips to Washington. Conferences with officials in the Department of Labor, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, the Federal Trade Commission, the National Mediation Board, the National Labor Relations Board, and many other important bureaus and agencies, and evening meetings usually with someone active in the life of the city enabled them to get a good over-all view of what makes our federal government run as it does.

This year, since wartime conditions have made long trips unwise and nearly impossible, we as a graduating class turned our interests toward state government. We realized that although we are in contact with the state government a good deal more than with the federal government, we were not fully aware of how it works. We decided to investigate state government along the same lines as those followed in studying federal government. A special session of the general assembly on the soldier vote made a trip to Harrisburg particularly opportune.

Interviews with state officials were scheduled for most of the first day. Shortly after we arrived in Harrisburg, we went to the Education Building to attend meetings that had been arranged for us. In the course of these, which lasted an average of fifty to sixty minutes each, the secretaries or their deputies explained to us the duties of their departments and answered any questions we brought up. The first was with a representative of the Depart-
ment of Forests and Waters. The second was with the secretary of welfare—a woman, as we were particularly interested to note. Our contact with Miss O'Hara convinced us that women can capably fill government office.

We went to the capitol cafeteria for lunch, after which we started out on the afternoon's series of interviews. The first on the schedule, with a physician in the Department of Health, was liked the best by many of the students because it demonstrated conclusively that not all jobs in the government are necessarily political. "We would cure you whether you were a Republican or Democrat," said Dr. Dickey. The next meeting, with a representative of the Department of Labor and Industry, was especially helpful to us since we had just been studying labor relations in our classes at school and were glad to learn the part played by the state government in them. The last interview of the afternoon was with the superintendent of public instruction and one of his assistants. This was somewhat of an open discussion, the students asking the superintendent questions on his department and its responsibilities.

After dinner that evening we returned to the Education Building, where a discussion with members of the general assembly had been arranged. The representatives to the house from Bucks County and the Republican majority leader of the house explained the soldier-vote bill to us and answered questions concerning it. The rest of the evening was turned over to us as free time.

During our stay in Harrisburg we took advantage of the opportunity to see some places of interest connected with the capital city. Immediately after getting settled in our rooms at the hotel, we went to the state library. Two things, the very generous lending policy of the library and the large number of books, impressed us in our brief visit. Most of the conferences having been held on the first day, we had time on the second morning for more sight-seeing. Perhaps the most imposing building we saw was the capitol, said by our guide to be the most beautiful in the country. Constructed in the early 1900's, it reflects the immense wealth of Pennsylvania; it has masses of eighteen-karat gold-leaf and rare marble and many great paintings. Next we went to the museum, which houses many relics of the State's early history, including the original copy of King Charles II's grant of land to William Penn. Here we were addressed by the state historian, Mr. Stev-
ens, who discussed with us various phases of the history of Pennsylvania and its capitol.

After a leisurely lunch, a few of us returned to the Education Building to see the Forum, a large and very beautiful amphitheatre used for concerts, educational programs, and other meetings. In the rear of the room are huge maps showing the development of world history. At two o'clock our entire group met in the senate chamber. Our expectation to sit in on a session was unfulfilled, however, for at approximately two-fifteen the senate, which had been scheduled to convene at two, was called to order only to be adjourned for caucus until three. We waited until four, when we had to go to the railroad station to take our train back to school.

The specific values which the group received, individually and collectively, were many. Of primary consequence was the improvement of our concept of state functions. We learned through our own observation that the state government exerts an even more definite influence over our lives than does the federal government; its importance became evident to us in our meetings with various officials. We were now able to comprehend the responsibilities of the Department of Welfare, for instance, and we perceived that the Department of Public Instruction is in intimate contact with youth throughout the state.

As a result of the trip, we shall now be better able than before to understand the functions of the state governments when we read about them in newspapers or history books. We have seen some of the persons who direct these functions. Each of us came home with an idea of the political aspect, but everywhere there was evidence of the opportunity and need for intelligent young men and women in the state's organization.

The experience as a whole furnished a pleasant change from the academic atmosphere of the schoolroom. Since we were learning in an environment not restricted to classes and books, we were in a good frame of mind to notice more and remember more than we might have otherwise. Just as experiments in chemistry and physics enable students to retain the facts which they demonstrate, first-hand contact with people and places significant in the workings of the state makes for a lasting appreciation of certain phases of history and government.

The trip was well planned; much of benefit was packed into the two days, and we want to express our appreciation to Mr. Heck-
man of the secondary education division, Department of Public Instruction, for assuring the success of the venture by piloting us around to many points of interest smoothly and systematically. But we all agreed that future groups might profit from an extension of the time. After our return to school we drew up a few suggestions designed to help other groups to learn even more than we did about the mechanics of our state government. They are as follows:

1. There must be genuine interest in the subject.
2. The students should be permitted to stay in Harrisburg about a week, actually participating in the work of various state departments by running errands and being useful in any other way possible, sitting in on conferences, and keeping alert to what is going on. The group would divide into a small number for each department, and in the evenings the members would come together for panel discussions.
3. The students should be given adequate opportunity to ask questions.
4. Definite knowledge of where the functions of the state government end and those of federal government begin should be gained.

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