SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION

By Philip S. Klein

LOVELY autumn weather, gracious hospitality, and one of the most entertaining programs in the Association's history were the rewards awaiting those who journeyed to Erie to attend the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association October 22-23, 1948. Our co-hosts, the Erie County Historical Society and Gannon College, left nothing undone to provide for the comfort of the visiting historians and contributed signally towards making this meeting an outstanding success. Over fifty members of the Association were on hand, while an equal number of interested residents of Erie and vicinity attended most of the sessions.

At the meeting of Council at noon on Friday, October 22, it was decided that the Association should appoint official representatives to attend the state and regional meetings of the Pennsylvania State Education Association in order to strengthen contacts with the secondary school teachers of history in the commonwealth. Council also discussed the progress of the Pennsylvania History Studies, commended the Publications Committee for its splendid work in connection with the completion of the first three numbers of the Studies, and considered plans for the extension of the series. Council also discussed at length the means by which the membership of the Association could be increased in order to provide the Editorial Board with the funds necessary to continue improvements in the Association's quarterly journal, Pennsylvania History.

At the opening historical session of Friday afternoon, Dr. Anna Quattrocchi of the Taylor Allderdice High School, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, presented a fascinating story of one of the men too little known in Pennsylvania history, "Thomas Hutchins in Western Pennsylvania." Mapmaker Hutchins, whose life has the flavor of a character from a picaresque novel, was the man who—among many other things—surveyed the Erie triangle. Mr. Nelson
Hale of the Academy High School, Erie, spoke on "The Pennsylvania Population Company," the organization which sought to promote settlement of Northwestern Pennsylvania in the period from 1792 to 1812. The financial failure of the Pennsylvania Population Company, which once owned almost 500,000 acres, retarded the settlement and injured the prosperity of Northwestern Pennsylvania for many years. To conclude the afternoon session, Mr. Jacob Evanson, Director of Secondary School Music in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, presented an entertaining program of Western Pennsylvania folk songs. He traced the development of folk music in the western region from colonial days to the present, explained its close relationship to the history of the region, and sang many samples of songs to illustrate his talk.

Gannon College entertained the Association at tea at the end of the formal afternoon sessions. The function was well attended and provided a pleasant opportunity for visiting members of the Association and local historians and teachers of Western Pennsylvania to become better acquainted with each other.

At 6:30 o'clock on Friday evening, ninety-six persons gathered at the Commons Room of Gannon College to enjoy the Annual Dinner of the Association. After a bountiful repast, Toastmaster Richard L. Beyers introduced Dr. Robert Fortenbaugh, President of the Association who, in his turn, introduced some of the prominent members of the Association. President Fortenbaugh spoke briefly of the work of the organization and of its plans for the future. The main speaker of the evening, Mr. M. H. Deardorff, Vice President of the Warren Bank and Trust Company, then addressed the group on "Cornplanter and His Indians." Speaking informally and without manuscript, Mr. Deardorff gave a most informative and entertaining story of the Cornplanter Indians—both in the olden times and today. He explained their early history, their relations with the British and the Americans during Revolutionary War days, and the litigation over the lands granted to them many years ago which to this day they have never been able to recover. He spoke also of the philosophy and character of the Cornplanter Indians with a sympathy and understanding that few modern white men possess. It was an instructive, amusing, and thought-provoking address which brought Mr. Deardorff a well-deserved ovation.
The business meeting of the Association convened at 9:30 o’clock on Saturday morning. At that meeting new officers were elected as follows: President, S. K. Stevens; First Vice President, J. Paul Selsam; Secretary, Philip S. Klein; Treasurer, Ross Pier Wright; Members of Council: Paul H. Giddens, J. Bennett Nolan, Homer T. Rosenberger, and Richard N. Williams, 2nd; and Editorial Board, Paul H. Giddens and Phelps Soule. The Publications Committee reported upon its past work and suggested a number of topics which may be incorporated into the Pennsylvania History Studies in the future. Dr. Rosenberger, Chairman of the Publications Committee, pointed out that this series of monographs will, in time, fill a number of gaps in the history of the commonwealth and thus lay the foundation for the projected comprehensive history of Pennsylvania which has been a long range objective of the Association since its inception. The Association approved resolutions urging that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania revive its plans of several years ago to construct an archives building to house the historical records of the commonwealth.

The theme of the Saturday morning session of historical papers was naval war on the Western waters. Mr. Max Rosenberg, Research Assistant of the Standard Oil Company of Indiana History Project, addressed the meeting on “The Building of the U. S. Flotilla on Lake Erie, 1812.” Mr. Rosenberg explained the incredible difficulties of this task—troubles in procurement of trained personnel, of construction material, and of ordnance. If it had not been for exceptionally high water on French Creek in the summer of 1813, which permitted the shipping of heavy equipment from Pittsburgh, the fleet could not have been built and the Northwest might possibly have been lost to the United States. Mr. Herbert R. Spencer, President of the Erie County Historical Society, developed some special aspects of Mr. Rosenberg’s paper. He dwelt particularly upon Daniel Dobbins—“the man whom history forgot;” he was the man who, despite almost insuperable obstacles (including Lt. Oliver H. Perry), got the Erie fleet ready for service. Mr. Spencer then told the story of the U.S.S. Michigan and explained its significance. The Michigan was the first iron warship in American history. It was constructed to patrol the Lakes just after the period of the Canadian Rebellion of 1837 and 1838, and antedated the Civil War Monitor by twenty years.
Mr. Spencer recently purchased the *Michigan* to prevent it from being scrapped, in hopes of finding a way to preserve it as a relic of Pennsylvania and of national history. To conclude the Saturday morning session, Dr. Theodore Parker of the History Department of the University of Pittsburgh spoke on "Western Pennsylvania and the Naval War on the Inland Rivers, 1861-1863." Dr. Parker described the construction in Pittsburgh of the original fleet of Mississippi River gunboats. As they proved to be too heavy to navigate the river channels, a second fleet of some sixty shallow draft vessels was later built which served to curb smuggling along the Ohio, protected union sympathizers in the border states, convoyed supplies, and prevented Confederate raids. Meanwhile Pittsburgh had developed naval ordnance plants which fabricated some of the finest large calibre guns produced anywhere in the world.

The luncheon conference, attended by nearly a hundred persons, was followed by a talk by Dr. S. K. Stevens, State Historian of Pennsylvania, on "The Biennial Historical Activities of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission." Dr. Stevens explained that the work of the Commission has been directed towards the collection of source material on Pennsylvania history, and the encouragement of research and writing in this field. The Commission has been microfilming important Pennsylvania documentary material which is located in important libraries outside the commonwealth—not only in the United States but in Canada. To promote research in Pennsylvania history, the Commission has been providing financial assistance to scholars who are in the midst of work on projects considered to be of outstanding importance by historians of the commonwealth.

The luncheon conference was next entertained by an illustrated talk by Dr. Paul H. Giddens, Professor of History at Allegheny College, on the subject "The Early Days of the Petroleum Industry in Western Pennsylvania." Dr. Giddens' slides of the oil industry, and his accompanying description, were highly illuminating. They included not only many scenes of operations and of personalities in the early days of oildom, but also some of the social history of the era—the songs of the oil boom, the advertisements of new inventions based on oil, and the life of oilmen in their hours away from the drillings.
More than forty persons assembled at the Old Customs House, headquarters of the Erie County Historical Society, for the historical pilgrimage after the luncheon. Under the guidance of the Erie County Historical Society, the visiting members of the Association drove to the site of the French and English Forts of Presque Isle, boarded the *Niagara*, saw the site of Perry's shipyards, stopped at the Anthony Wayne Memorial blockhouse—a replica of the fortress where the General died, and then took the magnificent trip out the peninsula where they examined the U.S.S. *Michigan* (now beached and in a bad state of disrepair), and the Perry Monument on Crystal Point. Mr. Herbert R. Spencer and Mr. Ross Pier Wright took charge of proceedings at each stopping place, explaining the history of each point of interest and answering numerous questions. At the Perry Memorial the convention adjourned.