THE NINETEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION AT READING

By Philip S. Klein

DELEGATES from all quarters of the Commonwealth found Berks County at its best during the two-day meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association at Reading last October 20 and 21. With the foliage at the height of its autumn splendor, corn in the shock and pumpkins round and plump, a cool tang in the air, but the sun still strong and warm, “Old Berks” was a symbol of fruitful Pennsylvania, and a compelling invitation to a fruitful meeting.

The Convention opened at 12:30 P.M. on Friday, with a luncheon in the flower-decked auditorium of the Historical Society of Berks County, our genial hosts. President Harry V. Masters, of Albright College, presided, introducing President Louis J. Heizmann of the Berks County Society, who welcomed the assembled group. J. Bennett Nolan, Esq., then spoke on “Reading City in History.” With his well-known combination of easy informality and phrases perfectly turned, Mr. Nolan traced a series of interesting episodes in the long history of Reading. He dwelt upon the fondness of the Penns for this colonial village, of Franklin’s interest in it as a defense frontier post during the French and Indian war, of its eminence as a supply center during the dark days of the American Revolution, of Lincoln’s expressed desire to visit here and the reasons why, even in death, his wish remained unfulfilled, of Reading’s part in the election of President Hayes, through the agency of one of her sons who served on the Electoral Commission in that disputed contest—William Strong, and of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s connection with the city.

At the afternoon session, presided over by Dr. Whitfield J. Bell of Dickinson College, three papers of unusual merit were presented. Rt. Rev. Kenneth G. Hamilton, Episcopus Fratrum, spoke on the “Cultural Contributions of Moravian Missions among the Indians.” Bishop Hamilton, after tracing the wide extent of Moravo
vian influence, and pointing out that the fundamental aim of Moravian missionaries was real conversion rather than mere charity or social work, appraised the results of the missionary effort. These were fivefold: a wider knowledge of the Scriptures; the creation of an educational program among the Indians; the cultivation of music; progress in external matters such as living standards, cleanliness, orderliness, development of crafts, etc.; and the improvement of social relations, particularly the marriage relation. In concluding, Bishop Hamilton noted that Moravian influence went far beyond the Christian Indian villages. It was carried not only by migrant Indians, but by white travellers into far corners of the continent.

Stevenson W. Fletcher, Dean Emeritus of the School of Agriculture of the Pennsylvania State College, spoke next on "The Expansion of the Agricultural Frontier." Dean Fletcher introduced his subject by explaining the original bases of Pennsylvania's agricultural growth: Penn's ideal of a land of small free-hold farms, the magnetism of good, cheap land, and the diversity of the early population. The various emigrant groups each sought land similar to that which they had known in the "old country." The Germans, thus, settled the limestone valleys, not because they were most accessible, but because they were most familiar. These valleys the Germans sought out in every portion of the state, in Somerset and Centre Counties, as well as in Lancaster and Berks. The Scotch-Irish, on the other hand, wanted slate land, with plenty of water but as little timber as possible. Dean Fletcher finally described how the great land speculation schemes of the late 18th century greatly retarded the agricultural growth of western Pennsylvania.

Lawrence S. Thurman, Curator of Old Economy, interestingly described the work of restoration which is now in progress at Economy, and spoke of the history of the community. In the seventeen original buildings at Ambridge, site of the Economy settlement, fifty-two rooms have already been restored to their original condition. Mr. Thurman emphasized the fact that the physical remains at Economy were so well preserved that little reconstruction was necessary; the primary work was the restoration of detail, a project facilitated by the existence at Ambridge of some 100,000 documents relating to the Rappist colony. As a sample of the
original material still intact, he mentioned the 3500 volume library of the community. In a brief historical survey of the Economy experiment, Mr. Thurman indicated the importance of the work accomplished there, both in the economic and social life of the Commonwealth.

On Friday evening, after a succulent lobster dinner at the Berkshire Country Club, Dr. Roy F. Nichols, past-President of the Association, spoke on "Where Did Our Colonial Forefathers Learn Politics?" Dr. Nichols recreated the story of half a dozen small but significant political gatherings in 16th and 17th century England which were symbolic of later American political habits of thought and action. During his recent lectureship in England, Dr. Nichols visited the scenes of these gatherings—East Anglia, where a handful of Cambridge students met to discuss in secret the idea of the Reformation; Scrooby, where Separatism flourished; Fillpot Lane, London, where the idea of representative government for Virginia was planned by London Company members; and others. In these small, intimate, sometimes secret meetings of young Englishmen, two ideas were put into action which were rare in Tudor and early Stuart England—the idea of free inquiry, and the idea of self-government. These ideas later became the significant bases of colonial political theory and practice.

At the Council meeting, held at the home of J. Bennett Nolan after the annual dinner, the major topic of discussion was how to enable the Association to defray the rising cost of publishing its magazine in this period of inflation. The solution of this problem, most agreed, was to be found in expanding the membership of the organization. In order to meet the immediate problem, the Council voted that each Council member should pay a Sustaining Membership fee for the ensuing year. As this was the second time Council had taken such action to meet a threatened budget deficit, it was further agreed that the Council should recommend to the business meeting that the regular annual dues should be raised by $1.00, making these dues $4.00 for individual members, and $4.50 for institutions.

The new editorship of Pennsylvania History was thoroughly discussed. As the Council felt it was not ready to make a final decision on a new editor at the meeting, it was formally agreed that Dr. Stevens, Dr. Nichols, and Dr. Hamilton should constitute
a committee to investigate further the qualifications of candidates for the post and to report to Council by mail as soon as possible.

The Annual Business Meeting convened at the Historical Society of Berks County on Saturday morning, October 21. After the minutes and the report of the Secretary had been approved, President Stevens announced that Mr. Melville Boyer had consented to devote special attention to ways and means of obtaining a wider circulation of Pennsylvania History magazine in the public schools of the Commonwealth.

Dr. Gipson reported resolutions expressing the deep sorrow of the Association at the loss of a dear friend and colleague, and one of the most active and loyal members of the Association, Dr. J. Paul Selsam. The membership rose in silent tribute to the memory of Dr. Selsam.

Dr. Nichols reported for the nominating committee, making the following recommendations: for 1st Vice President, to fill the unexpired term of Dr. Selsam, Paul Giddens; for 3rd Vice President, for a three-year term, James A. Barnes; for Council, for three years, J. Orin Oliphant, William A. Russ, Whitfield J. Bell, and Ralph Cordier. All of the above were placed in nomination, and the Secretary was instructed by the membership to cast a unanimous ballot for their election.

The Committee on Resolutions offered resolutions of thanks to the Historical Society of Berks County for its hospitality, and to the Committee on Local Arrangements for its excellent work. Dr. Nichols offered a resolution expressing the appreciation of the Association for the long and faithful service rendered by Mrs. Alice W. Frazier in handling the clerical burden of bookkeeping for the organization.

Dr. Robert Fortenbaugh reported on the sale of the Pennsylvania History Studies Series, stating that approximately 2,000 of the Pennsylvania-German pamphlets had been sold, and 1000 each of the Quaker and Scotch-Irish pamphlets.

It was moved, seconded and passed that the recommendation of Council for raising annual dues by $1.00 be accepted, to become effective on January 1, 1951. The Secretary was instructed to bill members at the new rate when their present subscriptions expired.

Frederic K. Miller, Acting President of Lebanon Valley College, opened the historical session which followed the business
meeting, introducing the speakers. Dr. Arthur C. Bining, of the University of Pennsylvania, presented the first paper, entitled "Iron Masters of Pennsylvania." He first traced the growth of the colonial iron industry in particular areas, speaking of Rutter, Stiegel and Potts in eastern section; Miles, Benner, and Curtin in central Pennsylvania; and Hayden, Jones, Oliphant, Turnbull, and others in the west. He then described the background and character of many of these early enterprisers. Contrary to common opinion, they were not all wealthy, nor aristocratic. Before becoming iron-masters, some had been blacksmiths, some clerks, some merchants, some farmers. Nor were they isolated from the life of other colonists. They engaged actively in politics, serving as judges and representatives, and all but two gave personal support to the American Revolutionary forces. Early in the 19th century came the transition from the early iron master who worked alongside his men, to the industrial age which broke down this personal relationship. Dr. Bining suggested Robert Coleman and Clement Brook as examples of iron masters who fore-shadowed the industrial age of iron production.

Dr. Catherine E. Reiser, of the University of Pittsburgh, spoke on "Pittsburgh Commerce and Industry in the Early Years of the Nineteenth Century." Dr. Reiser explained that Pittsburgh's commercial importance, after the frontier had passed beyond it, rested upon four factors: it was the center of a natural economic area, it was situated in the heart of a thriving agricultural region, it became a supply center for transients moving farther west, and its geographic isolation, at this time, proved a stimulus to the creation of local markets. Pittsburgh's industry, in 1803, produced the following commodities, listed in order of importance: iron, textiles, boats, leather, wood products, liquor, brick and stone, and glass. These products were exported mostly to New Orleans. Imports, on the other hand, usually came from Philadelphia. Commercial activities were complicated by the lack of a dependable currency. Much business had to be done on a barter basis. Pittsburgh merchants of this era were primarily of two types: those who sold non-Pittsburgh merchandise, and local manufacturers who acted also as retail merchants selling the products of their own manufacture. The public market houses, also, held an important place in commercial exchange.
To conclude the morning session, Edward M. Riley, Historian of the Independence National Park Project, gave a fascinating description of the program now in progress to restore the Independence Hall area in Philadelphia to something like its original appearance. Under his formal topic, “The National Park Service Program in Old Philadelphia,” Mr. Riley explained the development of federal legislation since 1906 regarding the preservation of historical sites. He noted that the number of sites now being cared for has grown from nine in 1916 to 116 in 1950, while the number of visitors to these places has increased from 5 million in 1945 to 12 million in 1950. The National Park Service emphasizes the conservation rather than the restoration or reconstruction of sites. Nonetheless, in the Independence Square project in Philadelphia, much restoration will be needed. Mr. Riley explained that a state project is working to clear buildings from the area north of Independence Square, while the national government project is responsible for the region to the east, between Independence Hall and the Delaware. Modern buildings will be removed from this area, while such early structures as the First Bank of the United States, the Merchant’s Exchange, the Bishop White and the Moylan houses, Carpenter’s Hall, and Christ Church will remain. The ultimate result will be a large park area in the vicinity of Independence Hall, in which all structures will be reminiscent of the formative years of the Republic.

For luncheon on Saturday, about fifty cars proceeded from Reading to the Daniel Boone Homestead. There, in the Boy Scout lodge, the delegation of over one hundred was served a home-style Pennsylvania Dutch dinner: swivveli soup, schmerekase, shoo-fly pie (for regular—not for dessert), and a further variety too large to mention. Isaac C. Sutton, Esq., who contributed much to create the Boy Scout camp at the homestead, spoke briefly on the boyhood life of Boone, after which the party visited the home. Leaving there at about 3 o’clock, the party drove to Hopewell Village, a memorable ride in brilliant sunshine through some of the most vivid autumn foliage that your reporter has ever seen.

At Hopewell Village, site of one of the best preserved colonial charcoal iron operations in this country, the historians were welcomed by National Park Service regional historian, Roy E. Appleman, and escorted through the numerous buildings by other
officials of the Park Service. The museum, and the reconstruction project of the great thirty-foot waterwheel and its blowing tubs were extremely popular attractions, as were the stack, the mansion house, and many other features of this large iron-making project.

The glorious weather, the friendly consideration of our hosts in providing for our comfort and pleasure, the unity of the program, the excellence of the papers, the size of the attendance, the interest of the tour—in short, every phase of the meeting contributed its part to making the whole an event of outstanding satisfaction to those who were fortunate enough to attend.