THE TWENTIETH ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION HELD AT STATE COLLEGE

By Philip S. Klein

LEGEND has it that neither rain nor sleet nor snow nor gloom of night stays the postman from his appointed round. Historians have either less stamina or more sense. At any rate, all of the above-named climatic elements converged on Centre County on November 2, and cut considerably into the size of the delegation which ordinarily attends these meetings, which was a pity because of the extraordinarily fine program which was presented. But despite the foulest weather of the fall, almost seventy-five historians were on hand to participate in the proceedings.

At the opening luncheon at the Nittany Lion Inn, State College, members of the Association were greeted by Ben Euwema, Dean of the School of Liberal Arts, Pennsylvania State College, and Roy Wilkinson, Jr., President of the Centre County Historical Society—co-hosts to the meeting. Dr. Milton W. Hamilton, former editor of Pennsylvania History, and now Senior Historian, Division of Archives and History, in New York, then delivered a splendid address upon “Sir William Johnson and Pennsylvania.” His purpose was to indicate points of contact between Johnson and Pennsylvania which were “suggestive rather than comprehensive.” Among these were the personal contacts of Johnson with such men as Weiser, Claus, Croghan, Teedyuscung, and Col. Bouquet. Johnson also was intimately connected with such Pennsylvania events as the Treaty of Fort Stanwix of 1768, and the Indian agreement to the extension of the Mason and Dixon Line. This eminent New Yorker and Indian Agent of the Crown conducted much of his business for the Indian service with Philadelphia merchants, sent two of his half-Indian sons to Pennsylvania to be educated, worked with the Anglican clergy of Philadelphia to promote missionary work among the Indians, imported many Pennsylvania artisans into his own land Holdings to the
north, and finally began an exchange of letters with Benjamin Franklin in relation to a western land promotion enterprise.

The general session of Friday afternoon focussed upon the history of central and western Pennsylvania. Alfred P. James, of the University of Pittsburgh spoke first upon "Benjamin Franklin’s Ohio Tracts." These tracts constituted eleven parcels of land along the Allegheny River in the present counties of Armstrong, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence which were purchased by Benjamin Franklin at a public auction of "depreciation lands" of the Commonwealth, in 1785. Professor James traced the history of these parcels from the time of their purchase by Franklin, describing their ownership by Richard Bache, their division among his seven heirs, their sale to William J. Duane, and his disposition of each. As a procedural study of the mechanics of research into an early land speculation venture, this paper was exceedingly instructive.

The lumber industry in northwestern Pennsylvania was the next subject for discussion by Samuel Wilhelm, of Clarion State Teachers College. In a paper entitled "The Wheeler and Dusenbury Lumber Company of Forest and Warren Counties," Mr. Wilhelm traced in detail the origins and development of this enterprise. The plan of William Wheeler, in 1833, to deliver pine from the region of Pottsville, N. Y., to the Mississippi Valley soon led to his purchase of a large stand of high grade pine near Endeavor, Forest County, along the Tionesta. The project expanded into the Wheeler and Dusenbury Company which, at the peak of its operations, was employing 325 men and shipping to Pittsburgh and Cincinnati about two and a half million board feet of lumber a year. Interest in the paper was heightened by the presence of W. R. Wheeler, a direct descendant of the founder of the company. Mr. Wilhelm’s paper was an excellent beginning in a field of Pennsylvania history which has been for too many years almost completely ignored.

To conclude the afternoon program, Ernest Miller, of Warren, presented a highly entertaining paper on "Oily Daze at Cherry Grove." Reconstructing with vivid imagery the picture of early oil prospecting, Mr. Miller began with the story of the unfortunate Henry Landsreth, who scientifically predicted the presence of oil in the then-unknown Cherry Grove area, but who never struck precisely the right place to prove his theory. Others soon
did. Rumor of a fabulous well on “tract 646,” which was operated with the utmost secrecy and continually guarded, brought “oil scouts” from other fields flocking into the area. Soon the news broke that “646” was a record breaking producer, and a new oil boom was on. The towns of Garfield and Farnsworth were born, a pipeline race began, and thousands rushed to the area. A succession of gushing wells so flooded the market that oil dropped to the lowest price in twenty years. Then, quickly as the flow had begun, it stopped, and Cherry Grove slowly reverted to the farmland it is today.

At the Annual Banquet on Friday evening, the Association was addressed by Frederick Rath, Director of the National Council on Historic Sites and Buildings, who spoke on “Historical Preservation Activity in America.” Mr. Rath constructed, in the image of a dream, a plan of community action for preservation of historical sites which would not only pay its way, but bring rich interest. His concept was built around community action to preserve some single building of both historic and architectural merit. The community effort, through service club campaigns, community “benefit” functions, young people’s club activity and a host of other co-operative fund-raising methods would, initially, create a sense of community solidarity and mutual interest which would enrich the concept of citizenship. Those working toward the goal would share in it. The Boy Scouts, Junior League, Chamber of Commerce, and many other community enterprises would have office space at a location which quickly would become the focal point of all unselfish community enterprise. A historical museum in the building would lie in the full line of traffic, stimulating interest and inquiry into other sites of importance, and curiosity about figures of the past whose eminence gave meaning to the site. A quickening appreciation within the community of the richness of its own past would communicate itself, through the inhabitants, to visitors, stimulating tourist trade and suggesting possibilities of business activities based upon newly discovered interests of the population. This dream of what might be in any community Mr. Rath presented as a problem in expert planning—a problem which the average community could scarcely be expected to solve without some special guidance. Such guidance he has been seeking to develop and make available to communities throughout the land.
The business meeting of the Association convened at 9 o’clock Saturday morning. After the approval of reports of the Secretary, Treasurer, Editor, and Publications Committee, President Stevens made two important announcements: first, that nearly one hundred members of the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies would soon become subscribers to *Pennsylvania History Magazine*, which would henceforth contain a section especially devoted to the interests of Federation members; and second, that the 1952 meeting of the Association would be held at Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, with Susquehanna University and the Snyder County Historical Society as co-hosts. The Nominating Committee then submitted the following recommendations for the election of officers: President, William A. Russ; Council, to fill the place of Dr. Russ, Russell J. Ferguson; First Vice-President, Paul A. Giddens; Council, for the term 1951-1953, Melville Boyer, J. Bennett Nolan, Homer Rosenberger, and R. Norris Williams, 2d. It was moved, seconded and passed that the nominations be closed, and that the Secretary be instructed to cast a unanimous ballot for those recommended by the Nominating Committee. Dr. Russ then assumed the presidential chair.

The following resolutions of thanks were unanimously voted: To Dr. Stevens for his splendid leadership during the term of his presidency, to Dean Ben Euwema, as representative of The Pennsylvania State College, for its support of the work of the Association, to Mrs. Alice Frazier and Mrs. Ilene Glenn for their able assistance to the Treasurer and the Secretary, respectively, and to the co-hosts of the convention, including the committees on local arrangements and program.

Following the business meeting, the members were treated to a most instructive and entertaining program of Pennsylvania folk music, English and German. Samuel P. Bayard, of Pennsylvania State College, assisted by Phil Jack, after describing the sources of the English folk song in Pennsylvania, and explaining its three major styles: even, free-time ornamental, and even-time ornamental, presented a series of recordings made in the field of the various types. Albert F. Buffington and Walter Boyer, both of the Pennsylvania State College, described and sang examples of German folk music in Pennsylvania. The German songs illustrated were also of three types: those relating to institutions such as the
home, tavern, church, politics, or the farm; those relating to sea- 
sons or festivals, such as snitzing, Fasnacht Day, New Year's, or 
cornhusking; and finally farm chants, dealing with the personi-
fication in song of various implements and sung as these were be-
ing used, such as the butter churn, the apple butter stirrer, or the 
knife sharpener. It was a meeting full of interest for all present, 
which was received with resounding applause.

At the Saturday luncheon, President Russ, on behalf of the 
American Association for State and Local History, bestowed upon 
past-President Stevens the Award of Merit voted to him by the 
American Association for State and Local History for distingui-
ished past services, and embodied in a handsome parchment 
scroll.

After the presentation, Arthur R. Warnock, Dean of Men 
Emeritus of the Pennsylvania State College, spoke on Centre 
County. With delightful wit and charming informality, Dean War-
nock explained the process by which he had, without any such 
intention, come to be regarded locally as a never failing fount of 
wisdom on local history. In the course of his talk, while disclaim-
ing any pretense of being an authority on the subject, Dean War-
nock succeeded in proving to the satisfaction of all that he richly 
deserved his local reputation. Although no motor tour of historic 
spots of the vicinity was included on this year's program, Dean 
Warnock provided one, taking us on a verbal trip around the 
County so graphically presented that none could miss the pictures.

In place of the customary tour, Saturday afternoon was devoted 
to a brief panel upon local history. J. Thomas Mitchell, Esq., of 
Bellefonte, the most eminent and productive modern historian of 
Centre County, spoke upon the twelve candidates for governor of 
Pennsylvania who had been residents of the County. While many 
were previously aware that Bellefonte has long been known as 
"the home of Governors," few had realized that this region had 
contributed so many names to gubernatorial contests. Mr. Mitchell 
spoke as a representative of that group of local historians who 
may properly be called "professional" by virtue of their many 
publications and the breadth of their historical interests. He was 
followed by Edward L. Willard, District Attorney of Centre 
County, as a representative of those historians whose interest in 
local history is avocational and highly specialized. Mr. Willard,
an outstanding authority on the history of State College, traced briefly the origins and periods of growth of that community. The session was concluded by Jerome K. Weinstein, Editor of the *Centre Daily Times*, who spoke upon the relationship between the local press and the local historian. Mr. Weinstein emphasized the need for brevity, simplicity, and accuracy in newspaper writing and discussed the difficulties which historians necessarily have in achieving all of these qualities simultaneously in articles intended for publication in the press.

Those who were courageous enough to brave the inclement weather and the well-known difficulties of access to State College under even the best of conditions were rewarded for their effort by a program which was generally acknowledged to have been of uniform excellence throughout.