LANCASTER COUNTY REMEMBERS

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LANCASTER County, being the fourth county in Pennsylvania to be erected and named, and the first one to come into existence after William Penn had named the three original counties, has now a history of 224 years which includes the lives of famous people and notable events and which is now part of the larger history of the state and nation. Lancaster County therefore has cause to remember its years; but, to make sure that the important story of the past would not be forgotten, certain Lancasterians many years ago saw the need of a local historical society.

It is now sixty-seven years since eight men met in the law office of Hon. William Uhler Hensel and laid the foundation of The Lancaster County Historical Society. Four of those men, since they were the ones who called the meeting, are known as the founders of the society. Each one of them made important contributions to the written record of Pennsylvania history and, because of this, every one is known to those who in this, our day, delve into the history of the Commonwealth. They were W. U. Hensel, LL.D.; Frank Ried Diffenderfer, Litt.D.; Rev. Joseph Henry Dubbs, D.D.; Rev. J. Max Hark, D.D.

Dr. Dubbs served as first president, and by his historical studies greatly enriched the early publications of the society. He was a devoted Christian minister and an efficient instructor. In 1903 he authored a history of Franklin and Marshall College, where for many years he was Audenried Professor of History and Archaeology.

Frank Ried Diffenderfer served at times as secretary, vice-president, and director of the society. Apart from his intense interest in history, he was also a banker and editor of the Lancaster New Era. One of the founders of The Pennsylvania-German Society, he also served as president of that group. A careful and accurate writer, he contributed more than seventy-five essays on Lancaster County history to the society.
Dr. Hark was pastor of the Lancaster Moravian congregation from 1878 to 1892, after which he was elevated to the presidency of the Moravian Seminary for Young Ladies at Bethlehem. Historians must ever be grateful for his translation of the *Chronicon Ephratense*, which gives the story of the Ephrata community as told by Brothers Lamech and Agrippa.

Mr. Hensel's chosen profession was law, and in his day he was the acknowledged leader of the Lancaster bar. However, Mr. Hensel was just as famous as a statesman and an orator, as an editor and a historian. He served as a president of the Pennsylvania-German Society and as a vice-president of the board of trustees of Franklin and Marshall College. A prolific writer for the society, he may best be remembered for his fine study of "The Christiana Riot." In 1912 he arranged a notable loan exhibition of historical portraits, which for comprehensiveness has seldom been equalled anywhere in Pennsylvania.

Following Dr. Dubbs and Dr. Diffenderfer, these scholarly gentlemen served as presidents of the society: George M. Steinman, Judge Charles I. Landis, H. Frank Eshleman, Esq., and Dr. Herbert H. Beck, now president emeritus. Each one of them has been an able historian and each one has added to the total of Pennsylvania historical writing.
While the Lancaster County Historical Society has been part of many projects of an historical nature, it has moved principally in two avenues of activity. The first has been the placing of bronze tablets at historical sites throughout Lancaster County. To date thirty-two such markers have been erected. The first one was put up in 1897 at the site of the home of George Ross, signer of the Declaration of Independence. In 1950 the last one was placed on the building which from 1801 to 1813 was the home of Andrew Ellicott. Ellicott was Surveyor-General of Pennsylvania during that period. Perhaps of greater import, he was surveyor for the capital city of Washington. In the years between 1897 and 1950, the society memorialized in like manner Robert Fulton the inventor, General Edward Hand, Christopher Marshall the diarist, President James Buchanan, William Henry the riflemaker, Thaddeus Stevens the "great commoner," Henry Wm. Stiegel the glassmaker, Jacob Eichholtz the portrait painter, Frederick Melsheimer the educator, General John Sutter, and Martin Meylin, the gunsmith.

The other activity of the society most worthy of mention is the printing of pamphlets which contain the papers and essays read at stated meetings. The Lancaster society is somewhat proud of this project, for the annual volume now being concluded will constitute the fifty-seventh which has been published annually
without one break. This, it is believed is an achievement not matched by many county historical societies.

The library, manuscript collections, bound newspaper files, and museum are open some part of each weekday for members and all who desire to avail themselves of the society’s holdings.

A stranger attending a meeting of the society during 1951 and 1952 might have been much surprised by some of the items in the treasurer’s reports. As an example, he would have heard that our receipts from the sale of tobacco were $1,125, that we sold corn in the amount of $709 and wheat for $233, and that we bought fertilizer for $344. The explanation is simply that a good woman by the name of Lizzie Widders from Ephrata Township bequeathed to the society a fine Lancaster County farm. For one year it was operated by the society and then disposed of at public auction.

Until twenty-six years ago, the Lancaster County Historical Society met at various places in Lancaster, as it did not own a home. In 1925 it purchased and moved into a North Duke Street building which was a part of the continental stables during colonial and Revolutionary years. Restored in 1925 by a benefactor, Mr. Walter Hager, the needs of the society through the years have been satisfied in this home. However, with ever increasing accessions and a desire to improve our facilities, the need has arisen for larger quarters. It is possible, therefore, that the time will come when the society will again move, this time to a location which also has some historic interest. Miss Mary Rettew of Lancaster, by will, provided for the ultimate erection of a building to house the Lancaster County Historical Society on a plot of ground on Marietta Avenue, immediately east of Wheatland, home of James Buchanan. The tract was originally a part of the Buchanan estate. Until that building becomes fact, the Lancaster Historical Society will continue to carry on at 307 North Duke Street.