

THE HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF INDIANA COUNTY

BY FRANCES STRONG HELMAN*

THE Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County was organized in the Indiana home of Blaine and Frances Strong Helman, November, 1938. Inspired to take this step by the fine collection of material in the files of the Historical Society of York County, and encouraged by Henry James Young, the director, six persons worked out the details for the Indiana County society, and each assumed responsibility for part of the work. The six were: Lawrence Hicks, President; Mrs. Mabel Wood McQuown, Secretary-Treasurer; Frances Helman, Corresponding Secretary; Mrs. Vesta Craig Hicks, Ira LeRoy Kelly and Blaine Helman, researchers. When a public announcement was made in April, 1939, the membership had increased to twenty-six. Space in the Indiana Free Library had been granted to the organization, and on May 1, 1939, fourteen books and a few pamphlets were placed on the shelf.

From this humble beginning, the society holdings have grown to several hundred books, bound newspapers, unpublished family records, cemetery entries, thousands of obituaries, wills from other counties, and a growing collection of museum pieces.

Meetings were first held in the homes of the members, every two weeks, then monthly, in the office of the janitor of the Indiana Free Library. After moving to the Indiana State Teachers College upon the invitation of Dr. Leroy A. King, meetings were held in the Pennsylvania Room in the College Library. In January, 1951, space was given the organization in Memorial Hall, Indiana, a county-owned building governed by a Board of Control composed of war veterans of the county. The society now uses one room on the first floor and two basement rooms for their li-

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INDIANA MEMORIAL HALL

Headquarters of the Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County.

Photo by E. Brown

brary and collections. Regular monthly meetings, always open to the public, are held in the second floor auditorium of Memorial Hall, usually on the first Friday of the month. The library is open Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, 6:30 to 9:00 o'clock, except holidays and the months of July and August. Out-of-town visitors may use the library during vacation months by appointment with the Director. This year over eight hundred names were written on the register before September 1.

The society obtained a charter in 1940. It is a member of the Federation of Pennsylvania Historical Societies, the American Association for State and Local History, the Pennsylvania Historical Association, and the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology.

From the original six the society has grown to over three hundred members located in several sections of Pennsylvania, and scattered among the states from New York through Ohio, Indiana, Minnesota, Kansas, Utah, and Nevada to California; from Arizona through the North-West and Alaska; and even in Japan. News letters keep the members informed of the society activities. The membership is one dollar per annum and life membership is twenty-five dollars.

The society holds an annual meeting with the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the War of 1812. It assisted the D.A.R., in 1953, in locating graves of three Revolutionary soldiers; and with the Indiana Post No. 1989, Veterans of Foreign Wars, it participated in the dedication ceremony arranged by the D.A.R. At present the society is assisting the Daughters of the American Revolution in the preparation of sketches of "Indiana County Veterans of the Revolutionary War."

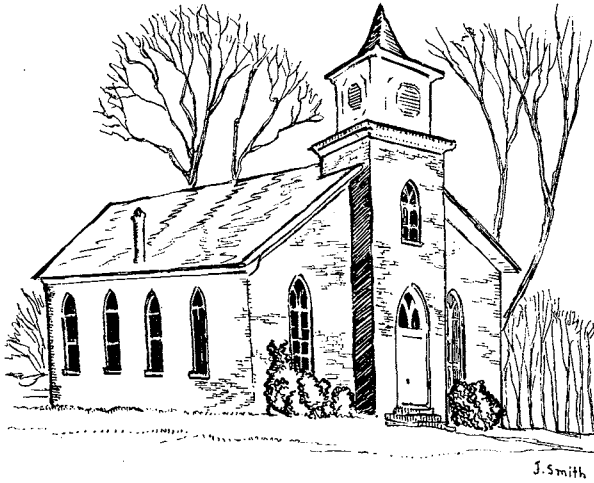
Four essay contests on the topic, "The Most Interesting Story in My Family," have been sponsored for county students. The society gives an annual award to the Indiana Art Association for the best painting of an historic spot in Indiana County, and participates in Pennsylvania Week activities through the medium of window exhibits and newspaper articles. It contributed material for the huge sesquicentennial edition of the *Indiana Evening Gazette* last year.

Over three hundred 35 millimeter slides of people and places of interest have been collected, and are available to groups in and around the county. "Indiana County's Heritage," a colored movie taken during the county sesquicentennial in 1953 by the official photographer, Fred D. Berkebile, is now in the possession of the society.

For several years bus trips have been taken to places of interest in the county, always including an old church and an old home. The trip this year included old Fort Ligonier in observance of the bicentennial of the French expedition into western Pennsylvania. Help in planning tours is given other organizations, and tours are conducted to historic sites within the borough. School groups visit the library for discussions of colonial life and the Civil War.

A "hymn sing" has been added to the year's program. The first took place at Gilgal Presbyterian Church, the oldest religious organization north of the Purchase Line, on Sunday afternoon, October 3.

The coöperation of the Historical and Genealogical Society with the Junior Historian chapters of the county is outstanding. The school history clubs have been welcomed to the society library where they assist with sorting, filing, typing, addressing mail, assembling booklets, and other work. Junior Historians pre-



GILGAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Courtesy Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County

sent an all-student program every April, and appear in patriotic parades as representatives of the society. Road markers were prepared by a group of Indiana students last year, and will be erected with suitable ceremony near Buena Vista iron furnace, Route 56, the only furnace remaining within the county limits. The furnace is soon to become the property of the county society.

Officers for 1955 are as follows: President, Gilbert S. Parnell, Indiana attorney; Vice-President, Mrs. Bruce Philippi; Recording Secretary, Mrs. James S. Gordon; Corresponding Secretary, Miss Ruby Trimble; Treasurer, Mrs. Fred Huber; Curator, Blaine Helman; Executive Director, Frances Strong Helman.