THE TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

BY ROBERT K. MURRAY, Secretary

THE twenty-fourth annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association opened with a luncheon on Friday, October 14, 1955, in Hogg Hall, Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania. Following a delicious meal at which fifty-six members and guests were present, Dr. Ralph C. Hutchison, President of Lafayette College, welcomed the Association on behalf of his institution, extending to the Association the hospitality and facilities of the college. Dr. Edwin B. Coddington, chairman of the Local Arrangements Committee, also welcomed the Association in the name of the Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society, calling attention to the fact that next year the Society would be fifty years old. Dr. Philip S. Klein, President of the Association, acknowledged these words of welcome, thanking both the college and the Northampton Society for their willingness to act as co-hosts for the twenty-fourth annual meeting.

The principal speaker at the luncheon session was to have been Dr. Amos A. Ettinger, presently a visiting professor at Southern Methodist University. Although an unexpected illness prevented his appearance, he had sent his paper, entitled "The Lehigh's Rocky Rapids," to Mr. Melville J. Boyer, program chairman, who read it skillfully. In this paper, Dr. Ettinger traced the origin of the Lehigh's name, surveyed the river's importance to eastern Pennsylvania, and described its winding course in beautiful prose. Only a romantic, such as Dr. Ettinger, could have spoken thus of the Lehigh, its history, and its significance.

The Friday afternoon session convened at 2:30 o'clock in Room 101, Kirby Hall. Professor Victor L. Johnson of Muhlenberg College presided and introduced the first speaker, the Hon. Henry L. Snyder of Allentown. In his paper, "Unique Aspects of the Trials of John Fries," Mr. Snyder re-told the famous story of Fries and
his treason trials. Concentrating mainly on the handling of the second trial, the author pointed out the highly irregular procedures used by the prosecution. The actions of the presiding judge, Samuel Chase, were particularly prejudicial to the interests of the defendants.

The second speaker, Mr. Karl F. Wittrich, formerly of Muhlenberg College, described the "Early Banking Practices in Lehigh County." In his paper, Mr. Wittrich examined the era 1814-1879 during which time twenty-seven banking institutions were founded of which but six survived. The speaker concluded that this failure record was due largely to a lack of central supervision coupled with too much competition.

At 4:15 o'clock the Friday afternoon session adjourned to Hogg Hall where the members of the History Department of Lafayette College and their wives acted as hosts at an informal tea and coffee hour.

The Annual Dinner meeting of the Association convened at 6:30 p.m. in the main dining room of the Hotel Easton. One hundred and four members and guests enjoyed a delicious meal, which was followed by the spirited singing of the Lafayette College Varsity Quartette. President Klein then introduced those at the speaker's table and proceeded to the testimonial for the honored guest of the evening—a man who needed no introduction, Dr. Lawrence Henry Gipson, Research Professor Emeritus of Lehigh University and author of the monumental multi-volamed *The British Empire Before the American Revolution*. Professor Gipson was presented an inscribed parchment of the testimonial as a token of the esteem in which he is held by the Association. A charter and council member of the Association, Dr. Gipson was its president in 1939.

The speaker of the evening was Dr. J. Edgar Swain, chairman of the Department of History, Muhlenberg College. Dr. Swain spoke on the general topic of modern trends in world history and cited as significant developments the decline of Europe in world affairs, the rise in importance of the Far East, and the "changed" policy of Russia. These developments, said Dr. Swain, make it imperative that we re-evaluate our own system, elect top calibre men to public office, and maintain a high level of prosperity. Although the speaker confessed that in some respects modern trends indicated difficult times ahead, he professed to see certain signs of
health in the total situation. Among these he mentioned the prospects of the peaceful use of atomic energy, continued reliance on the practicability of international cooperation, and a moral rebirth in certain areas of the world, particularly in the United States.

Following the dinner meeting, members and guests were taken by chartered bus on a tour of the historic sites in Easton. These included the First Reformed Church, the George Taylor House, and the Headquarters of the Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society. At the latter, punch and cookies were served by the women of the Society.

On Saturday morning, Phi Alpha Theta, national history honorary, acted as host at a breakfast served to members and guests in the Hotel Easton. At the conclusion of this affair, the convention assembled on the Lafayette College campus in Room 101, Kirby Hall, for the annual business meeting. The following action was taken: Dr. J. Cutler Andrews was elected vice-president to serve from 1955 to 1958; Messrs. Edwin Coddington, Alfred James, Louis Heizmann, and John Powell were elected to the Council to serve from 1955 to 1958; A. D. Graeff was elected to the Council to fill the unexpired term of Dr. Russell Ferguson to 1956. A report was made on the financial status of the Association and the Secretary reported a membership of 1,400. Dr. Paul A. W. Wallace reported for the magazine by announcing the appointment of Mr. Norman B. Wilkinson to replace Dr. Ferguson as Book Review Editor, and reminded members that the January, 1956, issue would be devoted entirely to the publication of the Livingston Indian papers. Next, the meeting went on record to request the Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction to take action on the report of the Association’s Committee on the Basic Course in United States and Pennsylvania History. The proposed Association budget for 1956 was then accepted and a series of resolutions thanking our hosts and expressing regret at the deaths of Dr. Russell J. Ferguson and Dr. Franklin Holbrook were adopted.

The Saturday morning session followed the business meeting. Dr. John M. Coleman of Lafayette College was chairman and introduced the two speakers, Professor Preston A. Barba, editor of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, and Dr. Albert V. House, of Harpur College, Endicott, New York.
Dr. House’s paper, “A Chapter in Pennsylvania Democratic politics in the 1870’s,” analyzed the activities of the Democratic party in Pennsylvania in the immediate post-Civil War period.\footnote{Dr. House’s paper is published in this issue.} Dr. Barba’s paper on “Symbols and Stones” discussed the meanings and deviation of the signs and symbols found on Pennsylvania German tombstones during the century from 1750 to 1850.\footnote{Published in this issue.} A spirited question and answer period followed the reading of this paper.

The last session of the twenty-fourth annual meeting began at 12:30 p.m. with a steak luncheon in Hogg Hall. Presiding was Dr. George D. Harmon of Lehigh University who introduced the speaker, Mr. J. Bennett Nolan of Reading. Choosing as his topic “Benjamin Franklin in the Lehigh Valley,” Mr. Nolan, in his engaging style, took his audience with him to fight the wars against the Indian in the Lehigh Valley. Particularly did he concentrate on the importance of Franklin’s fort for the security of the Lehigh area.

It was originally planned that following this last luncheon the members would be conducted on an historical tour of the Moravian Settlement at Bethlehem, but torrential rains precluded such a journey. Hence, the convention was adjourned after a few closing remarks by Drs. Coddington and Klein, so that all present could get an early start home.

Despite the fact most of those attending arrived on Friday in a pouring rain and departed under still dripping skies, the convention’s spirit was bright and undimmed. If possible, the dismal weather served to kindle an esprit de corps which rendered wet shoes and soggy clothes of no important consequence since all present were in the same companionable predicament. One fact is sure: whatever the convention lacked in meteorological pleasantness, the local arrangements and program committees compensated for in hospitality, fine entertainment, delectable food and interesting papers.