FIFTY-TWO enthusiastic gentlemen met in the parlor of York's Colonial Hotel on the evening of March 25, 1895, and proceeded to organize the Historical Society of York County. Desiring to profit from experience gained elsewhere, they had invited certain visitors from out of town, with an amusing result. While the librarian of Pennsylvania's oldest historical society sent only a letter of regret, a characteristic neighborliness of long standing was demonstrated from across the border. The President of the Maryland Historical Society, a man in his ninety-second year, traveled up from Baltimore, assisted with wise counsel, and subscribed to membership. The program projected at that first meeting was promising. There were to be scheduled meetings, and historical materials were to be gathered. Slightly later, as a gesture of modernity, women were admitted as members. Changes of emphasis have come from time to time during subsequent years, but those first plans were soundly laid and operation has been continuous.

Already York County had demonstrated a keen interest in its own history; obviously the fifty-two gentlemen merely encouraged into flame coals which had warmly glowed over a long period. Back in 1825, when the visit of Lafayette, republican hero of two continents, had been loudly cheered by York citizens, the older of these recalled his presence at York during an age amazingly different. Never in history, it seemed to these oldsters, had so sweeping a change occurred within one lifetime. Their reminiscent chatter gradually evolved into print, and following serialization in a local newspaper there appeared, in 1834, a *History of York County*, by Carter and Glossbrenner. Though small and somewhat haphazard, the volume presented a valuable account of local institutions and chronicled proudly the days when Congress met at York. Ten

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years later, I. Daniel Rupp, having explored county records afresh, renewed interest in the past when, in 1845, he published his *History of York and Lancaster Counties*. Moreover, the thundering oratory of successive Independence Days had stirred local pride, anniversaries of the battle of North Point had kept green the memory of those York Volunteers who had marched to defend Baltimore, and the invasion of Early’s Confederates had brought history close indeed.

Somewhat later, in York as elsewhere throughout the nation, the centennial of Independence was celebrated with jubilation. Ten years later still, John Gibson’s great thick *History of York County* appeared, and the very next year, 1887, with exhibits, orations and parades, York celebrated the centennial of its own incorporation as a borough. Historical activity was already almost continuous. Nor did the local press abandon Clio. From the eighteen seventies through the nineties, reminiscences and articles on subjects of local history dotted the York newspapers. Recalling all these evidences of keen and continuing interest, it appears a bit strange that it was as late as 1895 that the fifty-two gentlemen launched the Historical Society. The venture was already somewhat past due.

Doubtless because it profited from a seedbed of historical interest so long and so thoroughly prepared, the new Society quickly became a center and has continued to function as the coordinating force in an historical interest which spreads far beyond its own membership. Thus rooted, it has thrived steadily. Before 1902, meetings were held at a local preparatory school, but in that year the County Commissioners provided spacious quarters in the Court House, then new. Within the secretary’s office collections of books and relics accumulated until internal pressure combined with the mounting need of the County for office space forced the Society to acquire a building of its own, and it took over the substantial quarters which it still occupies.

Society organization became more solid and definite with the securing in 1902 of a charter as a nonprofit corporation. That charter was amended and a thorough reorganization effected in 1937. There is now a governing board of twenty-one trustees, and a substantial program is conducted under a salaried Director assisted by five employes, two of whom are occupied full-time at the Society.
Things were not always thus, however. Until 1927 the Secretary, George R. Prowell, kept open the Society's room at the Court House in person and at his own expense, the only consideration being the favored location which brought him custom as a professional genealogist. He busied himself with history, too, for many years published each week in a local newspaper at least
one extended article of local historical interest, and in 1907 put out a two-volume *History of York County*.

Elaborate observance of the sesquicentennial of York's glorious days as the seat of Congress ran through much of the year 1927. A special fund raised for the celebration was oversubscribed, and the handsome surplus, diverted to the general purposes of the Society, cushioned the shock of the years of depression which followed. In this period Mr. Prowell died, and the Society plunged into genealogical research. In the erroneous belief that extensive revenue would result, the Society employed a staff genealogist. To the delight of customers and research visitors, genealogical reports were produced by the hundreds, intensive research was conducted among local sources, and many valuable records were uncovered and rendered usable. While hope for financial profit from genealogy proved unfounded, this spurt of activity brought new friends, increased membership, and resulted in the recruiting of a paid staff. From all this there developed gradually a broadened program such as is normal to most historical societies.

By the middle thirties, the Historical Society had become a prominent and accepted feature in the educational and cultural pattern of York County. Special attention had been given to a publicity program, with encouraging results. When, in 1937, it became necessary for the Society to find itself new quarters, with very little difficulty and with no appeal to the general public $26,619 was raised from 185 individuals and firms. When opened in 1938, the present building was completely free from indebtedness.

The present building, in itself, made possible a better-rounded program with improved relations between the Society and the community. As one result, three bequests reaching a total of close to three hundred thousand dollars were received during the nineteen forties. Still more recently there has come a gift of real estate which will make possible a much larger, more adaptable building. As of June, 1956, the capital of the Society, exclusive of museum collections, was valued at $612,000.

Financially, the Society has been strikingly successful. It has never feared to spend when spending was advantageous, and it has never been in debt. Recent years have seen annual expenditures rise from $5,900 in 1938 to $16,800 in 1955. During the
same period the annual payroll has gone from $2,600 to $11,300.

Membership, also, has reached high levels considering the size of the community, even though no especially important privileges result from joining the Society. In 1955 there were 820 members, a figure higher than any attained since 1940 and the third highest total ever reached. The explanation for such mass support can be only that the Society has so well oriented itself to community needs and interests.

As presently conducted, the Society holds three meetings yearly: In January comes the annual business meeting, on Fastnacht (Shrove Tuesday) there is a reception, and during May there is an historical tour. Largely because the Society lacks an auditorium, the series of historical and genealogical forums, of which seventy-two were held during the years 1938 through 1941, has become inactive.

The library is composed of twelve thousand volumes, carefully collected and pruned, catalogued with Library of Congress cards. It has grown by judicious purchase. In the last eighteen years $6,100 has been spent acquiring books, maps, and newspapers;
and $1,850 has been spent on binding. It has grown likewise by gift: notably, the Altland Historical Library, 1,200 volumes on American political history, which was presented in 1938-1939; and more recently the Heathcote Collection of Bibles. The library has increased also through research. Its microfilm project, begun in 1936, now covers two hundred thousand pages of historical materials. The film-slide collection on local history, begun in 1941, contains six hundred slides. The cemetery inscriptions file, virtually finished in 1937, holds 250,000 abstracts from 450 local cemeteries. The file of transcripts and translations of church registers covers ninety-four local parishes. Exhaustive indexes of all the histories of the county have been typed. Because of the value of its research collections the Society was cited by the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies in 1939 and 1947, and by the American Association for State and Local History in 1949.

The museum includes Indian artifacts, relics of local history, and well-organized scientific collections relating to the county: an herbarium, a collection of minerals, and a bird collection. In arrangement for display, however, the museum has suffered both for want of space and for want of a full-time curator. Last year the total of visitors was but 2,848, forty-one per cent below the average of the last twenty years.

But a new period of rapid progress is evidently about to begin. The building program, which is now delayed only by legal complications, calls for an auditorium and in addition seven times as much floor space as is now available. Inevitably the larger plant will require a larger staff, including a museum specialist. To meet this expansion a public subscription will probably be necessary, for most of the present capital must be kept on interest to anticipate increased operating expenses. When, however, the problems of a building and of staff are solved, perhaps in a very few years, the Society will be prepared to launch a new program of the highest quality.
The York Hotel, kept in 1800.
No better and good cooks can be found no where
to prepare victuals for the table. As these Taveries,
see the names—1801, Abraham Miller, Mrs. Ely, Wulstenmaier,
Mr. Cooker, Mrs. Sandt, Mrs. Upp, Mr. Himmel, Mrs. Baltzer, Strangler,
Mrs. George Hoy, Mrs. Beard, and Mrs. Richard Berger, not far
down the five last names.

The brick oven baking
Bread,
Baking sausage
and buns.

He had plenty of raw materials to cook them. Bred, veal, ham, mutton,
York and fish, onions, lettuce, eggs, butter, cheese, milk and honey,
and all kinds of vegetables and fruit. See Mrs. Hoyle in 1801. She
could take every thing out of a chicken, for the table. It was good to carve.

In her customers left her house.

Mrs. Letman, frying sweet potatoes and give to Lewis Miller.
Some of them the best I ever tasted. They were really good eating.
It was on her corner South George Street, 1809.