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President of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, 1957-1959
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY IN OUR SCHOOLS AND IN THE PUBLIC MIND

BY RALPH W. CORDIER*

IN ACCORDANCE with tradition I should like to address a few remarks to the members of this distinguished Association. Some of my predecessors chose to give their presidential address at the opening of their three-year term of office. This permits one to present a platform of action for the immediate direction of the Association. I chose, as did Dr. Philip Klein, to give my address at the close of my term in the hope that hindsight might give me a better basis from which to view the program of our Association.

I should like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the officers of the Association, to the members of our Executive Council and to our membership for their encouragement, support, and cooperation which have made my work in this office a genuine pleasure. I should confess that when our nominating committee invited me to stand for election three years ago, I agreed to do so most reluctantly. The reasons for my reluctance were not far to seek.

This Association has had and continues to have within its membership distinguished historians whose acquaintance has been a delight and an inspiration to all of us. Our annual meetings and our official journal have been geared to scholarly studies in the field of Pennsylvania history. Our Association has gained the stature it presently enjoys through the efforts of countless individuals who have been devoted to scholarly study and research within this field. The Association is, in fact, the principal agency through which the fruits of these efforts have been given currency throughout the state and have been made available to students of history in other states as well.

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By reason of my experience, I have brought to the work of this Association a point of view that is different from, but not at variance with, the obvious objectives of our group. Despite the fact that I have spent most of my life in the teaching of history—first in secondary schools and for over fifteen years in colleges, I have had only limited experience in historical research. My energies have been expended rather in the writing of history textbooks for use in our public schools.

In the summer of 1946 I taught at the Louisiana State University where I renewed acquaintance with a former college mate. My friend was engaged in an original study that was to become a volume in the Southern Biographical Series. At that time I was deeply involved in the writing of a four-volume series of school histories. We fell into a lively debate over the relative merits of our respective endeavors. Obviously, both of us entered the argument with a firm bias. While we failed to settle the matter, we agreed that both tasks needed to be done. The fruits of historical research are essential to the preparation of authentic school histories. And authentic school history is not only essential to the civic education of our youth, but is the means by which to develop an abiding interest in history. Macaulay wrote in his history of England that he could "cheerfully bear the reproach of having descended below the dignity of history if I can succeed in placing before the English of the nineteenth century a true picture of the life of their ancestors." This should be the over-riding objective of all historical writing whether one is writing for children or for adult citizens. It is one for which Lord Macaulay need not have apologized.

Let us consider the status of Pennsylvania history in our public schools and the character of instruction in this field. Ten years ago the requirement that all elementary teachers should have had a course in Pennsylvania history was dropped as a result of a change in certification requirements. Since then, the teaching of Pennsylvania history in our elementary schools has steadily deteriorated. It is given little more than a passing nod during Pennsylvania Week, in the biographical study of William Penn and Benjamin Franklin, in references to local heroes or a nearby historical site.

Many of the teachers in our secondary schools likewise are inadequately prepared to teach courses in Pennsylvania history. This arises from the fact that the certification requirements may be met by a combined course in United States and Pennsylvania history. In practice, college and university instructors find little time to give to a systematic study of Pennsylvania history in this course. Several years ago (in 1955) a committee of our Association recommended, without success, the elimination of this combined course, and recommended that all majors in secondary history and social studies be required to take a course in Pennsylvania history. Fortunately the need is met, in part, by reason of the fact that most of our colleges and universities offer an elective course in Pennsylvania history.

The provision that a course in Pennsylvania history shall be taught in the secondary school is on firm ground, thanks largely to action that was taken twenty years ago by the General Assembly and the State Council on Education. That was the time when the newspapers of the country launched an attack upon the inadequacy of American history teaching in our schools. To combat these charges the American Historical Association, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the National Council for the Social Studies appointed a joint committee, on which I had the pleasure of serving as a member, and charged it with the responsibility of coming up with some constructive answers to the charges. Among other things, the committee recommended that in teaching American history the chronological emphasis should be moved forward at each advancing grade level, that a fresh interpretation be given the study at each level and that the study of American history should be directed toward giving the student a fundamental understanding and appreciation of his historical heritage.

A similar re-evaluation of the teaching and study of Pennsylvania history in our secondary schools is needed. Dr. S. K. Stevens once said, "Our local environment and history are the mirror in which are reflected every aspect of our history as a nation. Here are to be observed and what is more important—understood—every process through which we built a nation out of a wilderness." You may be interested to know that over the

past three years, a committee of the Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies has been preparing a new course of study in the social studies for the secondary school. Its recommendations will be submitted to the Department of Public Instruction this fall. Among its recommendations is a proposed three-year package on American studies in which Pennsylvania history is given a prominent place.

The package on American studies includes United States history to 1876 in the eighth grade, Pennsylvania history and American, state, and local government in the ninth grade, and United States history from 1876 to the present in the tenth grade. The division of early and late United States history between the eighth and tenth grades is intended to eliminate the needless repetition that has occurred in this course in the past, and thereby to encourage greater depth of learning. Pennsylvania history, which is inserted at the ninth-grade level, is recommended as a case study in United States history. As Dr. Stevens implied, Pennsylvania history is intimately related to many of the major movements and developments in the history of the United States. By placing it in this position its study can be taken up immediately following the study of early United States history with which it should be systematically related. And the study of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aspects of Pennsylvania history can be pointed toward, and serve as the foundation for the study of United States history in the period since 1876, in the tenth grade.

I have already alluded to the fact that some of our secondary school teachers have had no training in Pennsylvania history or only a limited amount of study in this field. And yet, in many of our larger secondary schools there are teachers whose entire teaching assignment consists of the teaching of multiple sections of Pennsylvania history. If their preparation is inadequate, then some steps should be taken to increase their competency in the field on an in-service basis. In his presidential address three years ago Dr. Klein expressed the hope that we might have in attendance at our annual meeting at least one secondary school teacher from each of the counties. Although we have not succeeded in getting this representation, an effort has been made over the past

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three years to interest secondary school teachers in becoming members of our Association. A number have done so. Now I think the time is ripe for us to take further steps in this direction.

One thing we should do is to appoint an outstanding secondary school teacher to our program committee. A second recommendation follows naturally. It is that we set up one or two sectional sessions in our annual meeting that will be of interest to secondary teachers of Pennsylvania history. Such sessions should not be confined to methodology in the teaching of Pennsylvania history. They should include original studies and a consideration of the sources and types of materials appropriate to the study of Pennsylvania history in the secondary school. Finally, I think we should make a definite effort to interest all of the secondary teachers of Pennsylvania history within the region in which our annual meeting is held to attend this meeting. This invitation could be extended through district school offices and through local social studies councils. I think it would be a good investment for us to mail out several hundred copies of our annual program to both teachers and civic-minded citizens within the region where our annual meeting is held, even though these people may not be members of the Association.

Each year a number of new faces appear at our annual meeting. Many of them are the faces of local people who have decided to come because the meeting is being held in their district. Let us encourage these people to join our caravan on a permanent basis as we move about the state from year to year.

Another pressing need for the improvement of the Pennsylvania history program in the secondary school is the provision for more adequate and appropriate study and reference materials. Steps have been taken to provide the teachers and students with suitable textual materials. Little effort, on the other hand, has been directed toward the preparation of enrichment reading materials or the kind of reference works that would supplement the treatment given the major aspects of Pennsylvania history by our textbooks. Such works would be of interest to our lay readers as well as to students and teachers. Yet, aside from our own pamphlet series and some of the publications of the Historical and Museum Commission, there is a serious dearth of such reference material in the field of Pennsylvania history.
In his study of the meanings and uses of history, Boyd C. Shafer alluded to this problem when he said, "The editors of the American Historical Review and many of its readers want fresh interpretive articles on large and significant themes. But we professional historians, deeply immersed in our specialties and often narrowly trained, seldom write them. We seem at times to care little about the meanings and values of our discipline, to devote ourselves too exclusively to the piling up of information on more and more minute and, perhaps, less and less significant subjects." After fully recognizing the need for scholarly research he went on to say, "It is time that we ask ourselves again and forcefully if learning is simply the accumulation of information or if it also calls for judgment, evaluation and determination of meaning for other individuals and for our society."

As you well know, countless studies have been done on the colonial period of Pennsylvania history, in respect to the ethnic groups who settled in Pennsylvania, the rise of industry and trade, and in the areas of religious, military, and political history of Pennsylvania. These studies provide the grist for the historian's mill and, perchance, the basis for the budding historian's advanced degree. For the student and the lay reader they may sparkle momentarily like fireflies in the night, but without adequately illuminating the historical darkness about them.

We have reached the point at which an analysis should be made of the scholarly studies within a given area of Pennsylvania history with a view to preparing a comprehensive and meaningful treatment of this particular aspect of our history. The student and the layman need to know the historical significance of an event, incident, or situation in time. They need to see these events in their relationship to the events and circumstances which give them meaning. And they need to see them in a larger perspective—in relation to historical developments within the region or the nation. To the extent that the student and the lay reader are able to relate studies in local, state, and national history will the tapestry of history become meaningful to them.

2 Ibid.
In his study of the nature and practice of state and local history, Philip Jordan emphasized this approach to history. He said, "Perhaps the major responsibility of local history is to keep the record. . . . The local historian, in a sense, is an auditor of one aspect of the business of history. He examines, totals, interprets, and submits his findings. The time arrives, however, when a larger study is needed, when a major policy of the industry needs examination, when perhaps the entire business structure comes under analysis." It is at this point that the analyst is called in to put the pieces and the parts together in some meaningful whole. Jordan likens this situation to an old-fashioned nest of boxes in which "local history is the smallest; state history, the next larger; regional history, still larger; and finally national history into which all the others fit. Each is an entity in itself; all are part of the whole."

There are still other directions in which we should move as an Association. I think most of you will agree that fruitful studies might be made in such areas as the history of science, the arts, literature, social reform, education, population changes and intellectual thought. We have given too little time and attention to the social and cultural aspects of Pennsylvania history.

Another direction in which we should move is toward the recent and contemporary aspects of our history. You may recall that Dr. Klein emphasized this point in his address to the Association three years ago. Using our official journal as a yardstick he discovered that fifty-four per cent of its articles related to colonial times. Forty-five and one-half per cent of its articles related to the period from 1776 to 1865. And one-half of one per cent of its articles related to the period since 1865. I might add that, while a considerable change has occurred along this line since then, further attention should be given to this problem not only in our journal but in future program planning as well.

It must be granted that our public school people are a step ahead of us in seeking an appropriate balance in historical emphasis. In the proposed course of study referred to before, the centennial year of 1876 is recommended for the termination of one course and the beginning of another, to which equal emphasis

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is to be given. That year, which was marked by a great exhibition held in Philadelphia, not only marked the conclusion of Reconstruction but a full century of notable beginnings and achievements in our national history. At the same time it marked the beginning of a new era in the development and growth of our nation and people. And Pennsylvania played a notable role in this development and growth. The development of new sources of energy and power, the rise of industry and its changing patterns, the coming of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe who have since become citizens, the rise of our cities and their dispersion into suburbia, the revolution in transportation and communications, the rise of mass education, the organization of labor, and social reform are but a few of the facets of the recent history of Pennsylvania on which fruitful research might be done and concerning which both our students and the layman should be informed.

We have a threefold task. First, we need to give greater attention to research in and the study of the recent and contemporary aspects of Pennsylvania history. Secondly, we need to explore the social and cultural aspects of our history. And finally, we need to organize and present the findings of research in the form of provocative summations that will enable the reader to see the great brush strokes of our history in their proper perspective, and which they will find both interesting and informative.

Raymond Aron once said that "at a certain moment of time an individual reflects on his own adventure, a community on its past, humanity on its evolution, and thus are born autobiography, particular histories, and universal history." I believe that moment of time has arrived in the study of Pennsylvania history.