THE 1975 RESEARCH CONFERENCE AT HARRISBURG

BY LOUIS M. WADDELL*

IN cooperation with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, the Tenth Annual Research Conference of the Pennsylvania Historical Association was conducted in Harrisburg on Friday, April 11, and Saturday, April 12, 1975. James P. Rodechko of Wilkes College was the general chairman of the two-day meeting. In charge of local arrangements was Harry E. Whipkey, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Conferees assembled on Friday afternoon at the property of the Historical Society of Dauphin County, the historic John Harris Mansion on South Front Street. After a welcome by Merlo Hartzell, president of the society, and introductory remarks by Donald H. Kent, president of the association, James Sperry of Bloomsburg State College moderated a panel of speakers whose topic fitted the theme "The Family in History."

Theodore Hershberg of the University of Pennsylvania gave a general description of the enormous program he directs, the Philadelphia Social History Project. Since 1971, under federal sponsorship, he has gathered a maximum of information concerning human activity in Philadelphia from 1850 to 1880. The time period was chosen because it was clearly one during which industrialization and urban growth had a great impact. It is not a satisfying experience to study more recent periods because there are many government restrictions on the information. The most obvious source for the period from 1850 to 1880, the decennial federal censuses, is not satisfactory because the questions asked by the census inquiries were not socially relevant. Since 1971, the data Hershberg and his colleagues have gathered has been fed into computers. This is the first year in which analysis and interpretation have been undertaken. The framework of the research project involves change over time, emphasizing categories of individuals as

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they tried, through their careers, to move toward the rewards of society; rewards in terms of jobs, residence, and wealth. Hershberg is now in the process of finding the linkage between members of particular ethnic groups who were geographically subdivided within the Philadelphia region.

Hershberg gave two examples of results drawn from his intense analysis of data. With regard to the social phenomenon of female heads-of-families in black American communities, the Philadelphia project has shown that this is not the continuation of a cultural pattern that existed under slavery. It is merely an ironic coincidence that black families in ante-bellum slave areas and in Philadelphia from 1850 to 1880 both had a predominance of female leadership; it is not a true cultural characteristic of black families throughout history. Economic conditions distinct from those of the slaveholding South account for the pattern in Philadelphia.

The project has also produced interesting results concerning patterns of life-style. Hershberg said that the life cycle of the twentieth century fixes the following six events in regular sequence: leaving school, first employment, leaving the home of upbringing, marriage, becoming head of a household, and birth of the first child. For the nineteenth century, the data indicates that the cycle was quite different.

Peter Stearns of Carnegie-Mellon University discussed the history of the aged. He apologized for the fact that much of his research has been done in European history and that he has not used such massive data as Hershberg and other social scientists now employ. Although the history of the aged is a new field for study, it is already necessary to correct some established generalizations. The currently prevalent belief that there were not enough elderly people in pre-industrial society to constitute a true demographic group is not justified statistically. There were many people over the age of 55, the age Stearns uses to roughly define old age. It is incorrect to say that they were treated with kindness and respect. Society did not voluntarily support the elderly, either through the family or through other institutions. Instead, there is good reason to believe that younger people regarded the aged as a nuisance and an impediment to normal social development. The elderly imposed themselves on younger members of society by clinging to rights, property, and positions.

With the coming of industrialization, the aged were hard pressed to survive. During the industrial revolution they survived, in large
part, by continuing to toil in the same occupations they had engaged in since youth. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the elderly began to develop a life-style of their own, and it is probably still emerging. Stearns pointed out that the marriage rate of people over 60 seems to be increasing during this century, and, surprisingly, the percentage of elderly people institutionalized has decreased since 1900.

Joseph Dowling of Lehigh University discussed the history of childhood. In his research he has tried to see the psychological dimension of any topic; he has always been attracted to abstractions and major generalizations. He said that he was curious to know whether psychological theories can be applied to descriptive data as extensive and detailed as that compiled in Hershberg's project. He was in agreement with Stearns that there are some inaccurate beliefs concerning the aged. Specifically, he agreed that the aged had never been respected for their wisdom and that they had been considered an impediment to society. Lloyd Demos's widely acclaimed study of New England Puritan children, *Little Commonwealth: Family Life in the Plymouth Colony* (1970), has shown that infants were given the best possible treatment, until weaned at the age of two. After that, the belief that children had an evil nature, a prevalent belief in European culture, led to harsh treatment of the little Puritans. Dowling pointed out that childhood, maturation, and adolescence are all debatable concepts. It is possible that human development could be explained without arbitrarily defined stages. He has found it intellectually satisfying to see that the history of psychology has successfully revised many arguments in the area of developmental psychology, and he cited especially the work of Erik H. Erikson (*Childhood and Society*—1950). Dowling believes that an ethnic, pluralistic society needs to know whether some of the cultures that it has inherited hold back the psychological development of members of the society who are descended from those older cultures. Some cultures, for example, stifle the capacity for deductive, abstract thinking. Dowling also expressed interest in Lloyd deMause's hypothesis that there is a history made up of psychological changes due to parent-child encounters, that is entirely independent of environmental changes such as industrialization and urbanization; a separate stream coexisting with cycles of material change. He also said that he has been fascinated to learn that shifting his research from macro-units to micro-units of human experience has not made it easier for him to reach conclusive answers. He had originally
assumed that the more intensive analysis arising from micro-unit study would leave few areas in doubt, but that has not been the case in his opinion.

On Friday evening conferees dined at Harrisburg's Nationwide Inn as guests of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. A cordial welcome was extended by Mrs. Ferne Smith Hetrick, chairman of the commission. Following dinner, Donald H. Kent, president of the association and former director of the commission's Bureau of Archives and History, commented on the efforts of the old Pennsylvania Historical Commission in restoring historical sites. He emphasized the work of the late Donald A. Cadzow, whose appointment as archaeologist in 1929 marked the beginning of a period of intense activity. At first Cadzow directed the archaeological digs and, at the same time, sought popular support for preservation and restoration work. Kent showed a film that Cadzow had made himself during stages of restoration work in the latter half of the 1930s. Cadzow had often presented the film to interested groups in order to develop awareness of the work that the commission performed. It showed some of the excavation work and emphasized the efforts that went into restoration. Pennsbury Manor, Governor Printz Park, and the Daniel Boone Homestead were among the historical properties covered at length in the film.

Departing from tradition, the sessions on Saturday morning, April 12, which were conducted at the commission's archives building, dealt with matters of current professional interest, rather than research topics. William J. Wewer, executive director of the commission, began a session on nonteaching careers in history by discussing opportunities for employment with the Commonwealth. Pointing out that there are relatively few positions for historians, archivists, and museum curators with the PHMC, Wewer said that many of the salaries for these positions are better than those offered by other states. He explained what the minimum requirements are and said that there has been relatively little turnover among those working for the commission. The backgrounds of three museum curators and a budgetary worker were presented as examples of the way history majors have found employment with the state's historical agency. Although there had once been a government career trainee program which was intended to develop anyone holding a bachelor's degree into permanent employment by giving them full-time on-the-job training with the state, the system has been discontinued. The civil service announcement for historian, archivist,
and curator was discussed, and Wewer explained that no written examination was involved. The results of a written examination for museum curators, attempted several years ago, had proved unsatisfactory. Wewer believes that history is a discipline that can prepare an individual for other fields, and that history majors can apply themselves to state government positions in budget and personnel operations and in management analysis.

Robert J. Plowman of the Philadelphia Federal Archives and Records Center spoke concerning positions for historians with the federal government. The Department of Defense employs more people as historians than any other branch of government. Among the services the Army employs the largest number of historians, who are usually classified from General Service (GS) level 9 to GS-15. The other three services employ historians for both short-term and long-term projects. But there are few openings in any of the services at present. Commenting briefly about opportunities for historians with the Library of Congress, the State Department, and the National Park Service, Plowman mentioned also that there are small projects with several federal departments: Agriculture, Labor, and Transportation. Also, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Atomic Energy Commission employ some historians.

The National Archives and Records Service (NARS) is the largest employer of archivists in the United States, and many of its archivists are history graduates. NARS employs 272 archivists, of whom 193 are located in Washington, D.C. In recent years most of the archivists have been recruited through a special training agreement which NARS concluded, in 1967, with the United States Civil Service Commission. A candidate must receive a score of 97 out of a possible 100 on the Professional Advancement Career Examination. Plowman emphasized the importance of mathematics and of veteran's preference, to achieve a high score on the examination. The candidate must also hold a B.A. degree with a semester-hour distribution that emphasizes certain fields related to history. He or she must have completed one year of graduate school education and must submit examples of research and writing. Those appointed to the positions start at the GS-7 level and are on training status for two years. Sixty-four have been hired under this arrangement, of whom all but four are still with NARS.

The Nixon presidential papers will provide NARS with more archival work than the Bicentennial, which does not seem to have
stimulated the hiring of archivists. Legislation is pending which would employ 103 new archivists to work on the Nixon papers over the next five years. People with backgrounds in history are also employed by NARS as archival assistants.

William Toner, director of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, was the moderator of the session, as well as the final speaker. He discussed employment opportunities with local and private societies, including county historical societies and museums. The incongruous nature of these organizations made it difficult for him to generalize, but, in his opinion, graduating history majors are unaware of the nature of the work performed in local societies and museums. A general background in United States history, such as many majors, including those with the M.A. degree, now receive, is not very helpful as preparation for employment with these societies. Toner believes that the Cooperstown, N.Y., postgraduate program is one of the few that really prepares the student for working in local historical societies. It is difficult for these organizations to find money to employ professionals. Even the larger local and county societies in Pennsylvania usually employ no more than three or four professional workers. Often there is a librarian, a museum curator, and an exhibit designer. There might also be a reference librarian, a manuscript curator (or both combined in one worker), and an educational programs director. Toner believes the short-term projects are good employment alternatives for history graduates, in view of the present shortage of full-time employment. He suggested that those seeking employment should try to create their own jobs by planning new projects and convincing societies to hire them to do the work.

The final session of the conference was concerned with the status of history in the public schools. The main topic of discussion was the alteration of standards for teachers' certification. Robert Clemmer of Lock Haven State College, session chairman, gave the background of the certification issue. In 1970 the Pennsylvania Department of Education altered its teachers' certification standards and, among other things, dropped history as a separate area in which a teacher might be certified. Although those with a heavy college emphasis in history can still be certified to teach social studies, objection to the change was voiced by the Association of Pennsylvania College and University Faculties. At the time it passed a resolution critical of the weak stand the American Historical Association had taken on the whole subject of history in secondary schools. The Association of
Faculties resolved to seek the return of history certification. In October, 1973, they received the support of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, which set up a committee "to consult with appropriate officials of the Department of Education to review the status of history in the social studies curriculum in general and the issue of history certification in particular." This committee, which included representatives from the Association of Faculties, met with officials of the Pennsylvania Department of Education on February 5, 1974, but the various issues raised were rebuffed. For that reason, this panel discussion was to examine the situation further. Clemmer distributed a list of the issues that had been suggested for discussion at the February 5, 1974, hearing.

Abram Foster of Millersville State College had attended the hearing. He stated his impressions of what had occurred. He believes that history is being downgraded within the group of subjects now considered the social studies. He does not agree with a pamphlet issued by the Bureau of Teacher Education Certification, in December, 1973, which states that there had been general acceptance of the social studies certification as a replacement for the specific disciplines.

George Deffenbach, chairman of a high school social studies department in Williamsport, pointed out that his unit was still inaccurately referred to as the history department. It had once been the history department, but over the years it has been saddled with responsibility for teaching new areas of the curriculum. Personally, he feels that the history department was the logical place for the addition of such items as a world culture unit, a communism unit, and values clarification. As for certification, Deffenbach found that whenever teacher candidates presented themselves with history certificates, it was impossible to hire them, because they were not certified in other subjects for which they had to be scheduled in order to make up full-time teaching positions. For several years Deffenbach has defended the continuation of a course in geography but has finally been outvoted on the issue and had to drop the course. Roughly one-half of the course content, however, has been saved by its being included in a new course entitled Environmental Adventures. Similarly, in his opinion, the content for the courses in World Cultures and Problems of Democracy is drawn heavily from history. Thus geography and history are being taught under other subject titles.

Elizabeth Geffen of Lebanon Valley College pointed out that
many of her students now prefer a social science major which allows them to choose broadly from courses in a number of departments. She finds that students today are vague about their college goals and delay choosing a major as long as possible. Nine additional credits must be taken, beyond the minimum of the social science major, in order for the student to be certified to teach by the time of graduation. So far, only one student has done this. Geffen has noted a shocking change in students' capacities, as well as in their attitudes. For example, she found that many are only vaguely aware of such major historical figures as Franklin D. Roosevelt. The situation is so disturbing that she has considered sponsoring a new textbook that will define basic concepts at an extremely simplified level.

James Kehl of the University of Pittsburgh said that the state Department of Education was following fashionable practices in emphasizing the interdisciplinary approach and defining social studies in the broadest possible way. But they were wrong in considering all social science disciplines as worthy of equal attention in the social studies curriculum. The entire discipline of social psychology, for example, is so limited that it is questionable whether a single complete course could be built around its total content. He also said that the minimum requirement for a professional historian was the Ph.D. degree. It is inappropriate, he believes, for the department to make decisions touching upon history teaching without the advice of a professional historian.

Elizabeth Haller was the last panelist. As a history adviser in the Pennsylvania Department of Education she had been among those participating in the February 5, 1974, hearing. She pointed out that the department had changed the whole teacher certification system, in 1970, by giving colleges and universities standards by which they determine approved programs for their students, rather than having the state Department of Education count the college credits completed by each applicant for certification. History is among the eight disciplines mentioned in these new standards, but it is entered as an alternative to "a social science discipline." The Department of Education had not singled out history any more than any other discipline. Of course, she concluded, since a history major could still obtain a social studies certificate, history had not really been dropped from certification.

The conference concluded with a luncheon provided by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.