

# THE Pennsylvania Magazine

OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

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## RETROSPECT

THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY, which completes with this issue sixty years of exploration into the rich and varied field of Pennsylvania and American history, is not the first quarterly that the Society sponsored. At a meeting of the Council of the Society on January 27, 1845, a resolution was adopted authorizing the publication of *The Bulletin*, a magazine designed to "contain such portions of the minutes as it may be deemed expedient to publish, and such papers of historical interest, as from their brevity would be better suited for publication in a Bulletin than in the Memoirs." Thomas Sergeant, president of the Society, was made chairman of the committee charged with the duty of issuing this periodical.

There was good precedent for this early attempt by the Society to establish a magazine of general historical interest. The first publication of The Massachusetts Historical Society appeared in weekly form in *The American Apollo*, a newspaper founded by the son of Jeremy Belknap, patron saint of our first American historical society. Other historical magazines under private control had been attempted. Samuel Hazard, curator of the Society, had supplied the need for such a journal in Pennsylvania a decade earlier by the publication of *Hazard's Register*. The publications of the various state societies, however, were chiefly issued in the form of annual volumes of *Collections*.

However, *The Bulletin* issued by the Society was short-lived. Beginning in the same month that James K. Polk took up his duties in the White House, it expired two and a half years later. It is now a relatively scarce volume, a fact all the more regrettable in view of the high standard of excellence which *The Bulletin* maintained. Its very first number included a reprint of Daniel Denton's exceedingly rare *Brief Description of New York*, published in London in 1670 and referred to by Meusel as "*Liber rarissimus*." The Society was enabled to reprint this early description of New York and New Jersey through the initiative of John Pennington, its editor, in obtaining a transcript from the copy in the British Museum. Other notable items in *The Bulletin* were the correspondence of Robert Morris and John Hancock in December, 1776; the journal of Isaac Senter kept during the expedition led by Benedict Arnold against Quebec; and the minutes of the Committee of Safety of Northumberland County, 1776-1777. The editing of *The Bulletin* was done with discriminating intelligence, and, in a day when editors of historical materials were likely to follow in the tradition of Sparks by taking liberties with their documents, its editors are entitled to a salute as worthy forerunners of THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY.

Shortly after *The Bulletin* met its untimely and regrettable end, the officers of the Society launched an effort to establish a Publication Fund in order that the *Memoirs* might continue to appear with regularity and especially in order that they might so continue to appear without draining the Society's funds, so much needed—as they always are—for other purposes. This proved to be a slow and difficult enterprise, but within two decades the Publication Fund had grown to such proportions that its income was ample to provide for a regular quarterly magazine and an occasional volume of the *Memoirs*. Following close on the Centennial of 1876, a notable event which focussed historical activity in Philadelphia and which led to increased interest in American backgrounds throughout the United States, the magazine began its long career early in 1877. John William Wallace was then president of the Society and the able and industrious Frederick D. Stone was its librarian.

At the Annual Meeting of the Society on May 7, 1877, the Council announced the beginning of this publication in their report and declared: "It is believed that this Magazine will meet a want long

felt throughout the commonwealth, and be a means of intercommunication that cannot fail to be of very great advantage, tending, too, it is hoped, to render more homogeneous the various populations comprised in the State." In this connection, continued the report, "it afforded the Council great pleasure to observe that Governor Hartranft, in his late annual message, spoke in most eulogistic terms of the publications of the Society, and of the importance of this Fund; and our members may rest assured that no effort shall be wanting on the part of the Trustees to deserve a continuance of such generous praise."

In closing the first volume, which set a high standard for all successive issues, the editors made a plea which the present Trustees of the Publication Fund desire to quote with complete endorsement: "To continue the *MAGAZINE* in its present form, to add to its attractions, and at the same time to lessen the demands made upon the Publication Fund, are the aims of those who have its management in hand. More money will be expended on the forthcoming volume than is likely to be received for it; but it is hoped that the historical value of the material produced in the volume issued, and its typographical excellence will so commend the enterprise to the public, that the Fund will be materially increased, and even greater expenditure warranted."

In an effort to maintain the high standard set in 1877, the Council at its meeting in February, 1935, authorized the Trustees of the Publication Fund to send the magazine free to all members of the Society, without any increase in membership dues. At the same time a change was authorized in the typography and format. This was accomplished in such a manner as to elicit commendation from some of the outstanding typographical experts in the country. Contributions have been solicited and received from reputable American historians, and every effort has been made and will continue to be made to maintain the well-earned reputation of this pioneer among historical journals in the United States.

There is another aspect of the statement of the first editors quoted above that the present Trustees would like to emphasize: the urgent need of continued support by subscribers to the Publication Fund. The present income of the Fund is sufficient to continue the magazine as now issued. But its pages could well be expanded to accomodate the

many worthwhile articles that are now being offered by competent scholars, many of which must be rejected for lack of space or must lie unpublished for many months. The Trustees likewise find themselves faced with one of the richest stores of unpublished historical documents in the country, and they cannot fail to urge the need of other channels of publication. If the Publication Fund were double its present size, the *Memoirs* might be revived and from the great collections of unpublished manuscripts housed in the Society's building might be drawn a rich and varied series of pictures of the great history of this Commonwealth. Half a century ago the president of this Society, Brinton Coxe, declared: "The publication and editing of texts and abstracts and of historical materials in every shape is now an exacting duty." The present Trustees willingly assume this "exacting duty" and hope that the continued support of the Publication Fund will be even more generous than in the past.

A. S. W. ROSENBACH, *Chairman*