Our Magazine: An Editorial

When The Historical Society of Pennsylvania was organized one hundred and thirty-four years ago its founders proclaimed their objective to be "the elucidation of the natural, civil and literary history" of the Commonwealth. The founders immediately decided that a major instrument of "elucida-
tion" should be the printed word placed in circulation. For more than half a century they experimented with various types of printed matter of their own creation—with Memoirs, Bulletins, Collections and even Miscellaneous Publications—but it was not until 1877 that they arrived at an answer which satisfied. In that year began the files of The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography. The present editorial directors of this Magazine, Nicholas B. Wainwright, Editor, and Lois V. Given, Associate Editor, have completed seven fruitful years of management and this happy fact gives the Society an opportunity to review this phase of its work of "elucida-
tion."

For almost a hundred years the pages of its various publications were filled with the industry and enthusiasm of the leaders of the Society and the fruits of their capacity for collecting. Articles, his-
torical and genealogical, and selections from the constantly growing collection of manuscript treasures were published, at first sporadi-
cally and then after 1877, quarterly. The burden of writing and editing was assumed largely by the members, officers, and staff. Two
librarians, Frederick D. Stone and John W. Jordan, conducted the 
*Magazine* for thirty-eight of the first forty-three years.

Interestingly enough, it now appears that for nearly a hundred 
years, from the Society's founding through the First World War, the 
"elucidation" of Pennsylvania history was considered to be ade-
quate, even outstanding, if it was merely confined to the years prior 
to 1800. The dearth of material after those years is appalling. More-
over, the history was limited topically as well as chronologically. 
Political biography and history, genealogy and some colonial cultural 
topics made up the narrow circle within which the Society's interests 
were confined.

However, the advancing twentieth century, the First World War, 
and new interests in historical scholarship at last brought to the 
Society a broader chronological and topical approach. Most signifi-
cant have been the talents and interests of the more recent editors. 
In 1935, Julian P. Boyd, a man of imagination and ideas, historically 
trained and familiar with a cultural pattern other than that of 
Philadelphia, took charge of the *Magazine*. He changed the format 
to a more tasteful and modern pattern and opened the pages, set in 
Caslon type, to a much broader sweep of writing. Centuries other 
than the eighteenth received consideration. All phases of the culture 
were represented, economic and social as well as political. Genealog-
ical articles were directed to the files of the Genealogical Society 
*Publications*. Book reviews were introduced. Most particularly, 
efforts were made to interest the historians, not only of Pennsyl-
vania, but of the nation, to publish in its numbers.

Dr. Boyd was succeeded by Professor Richard Harrison Shryock 
of the University of Pennsylvania. In turn, R. N. Williams, 2nd, 
Director of the Society, assumed the leadership, and then seven years 
ago Nicholas B. Wainwright, Director of Research for the Society, 
was appointed. He and Miss Lois V. Given, at that time Assistant 
Editor, since then have been most successful in their direction of the 
*Magazine*.

These efforts have made the Society's publication not only the 
oldest continuous historical society journal, but one of the most 
consistently edited and beautifully printed in the nation. It has 
extensive circulation, not confined to the United States, for I was 
told the other day that its arrival was eagerly awaited each quarter
in Egypt. (Copies are also sent to Canada, Australia, and the British Isles, Germany, France, Spain, The Netherlands and Czechoslovakia.)

In 1954, the usefulness of the Magazine was greatly enhanced by the publication of a cumulative index covering the first seventy-five volumes. This voluminous and comprehensive key to these volumes had been initiated by R. N. Williams and Dr. Margaret L. Bailey, then Assistant Editor of the Magazine, and carried to completion by many hands, the work of Dr. Eugene E. Doll being the most constant and notable.

An examination of the files of the Magazine in these last seven years indicates some very satisfying and significant achievements. The articles are well written, in large part by a new and very promising generation of historians. The Magazine is cosmopolitan in its scope. Various types of history—economic, social, cultural, as well as political—are represented. Editorial interest, while predominantly in the Middle States, as it should be, is by no means exclusively so, and other sections of the nation are included. Documents have been edited, notably the interesting diaries of Sidney George Fisher. More attention has been paid to illustration, and certain well-reproduced pictures, including some in color, have been inserted. The book reviews have been given special attention and reviewers selected who would give thoughtful and critical evaluations.

Most significant is the fact that the editors have recognized the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as worthy of historical attention. This fact is emphasized because it is obvious that historians are getting farther and farther behind in their coverage. At the rate at which material is piling up in public archives and libraries the urgency of the situation is becoming compelling. Unless we are to be content with the idea that the colonial period, the Revolution, and the Civil War, plus the creation of the Constitution, are all that is of significance in the nation's history, we must make a more concerted attack on other epochs. The interest which the Director and the editors of the Historical Society have shown in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is highly to be commended. Would that more of the members of the Society might add to its collections from their letter files and memorabilia. If we are to prepare for our suc-
cessors, we must provide them with the sources for the history of our own time.

The editors have established an enviable record for skill and care, taste and comprehensiveness in their editorial policy and performance. Having developed these capacities to such a degree so early in their careers, they encourage the Society to believe that even more accomplishments lie ahead of them. That this is not merely an internal judgment is witnessed by the fact that this spring Mr. Wainwright received a Special Citation from the Society of American Historians—"because of the high standard of scholarship and readability which the magazine has sustained under his editorship."

ROY F. NICHOLS
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