THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA.
Its History, Objects and Achievements.

By Burd S. Patterson

The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania finding that its present building is entirely inadequate for its needs desires to make a large addition to the structure in accordance with the original plans. To that end it proposes to ask the present session of the legislature to appropriate a sufficient sum. The legislature of 1911 appropriated $25,000 to the society for the erection of the front portion of its building with the understanding that a much larger sum would be appropriated later on to complete the structure in accordance with plans then submitted.

The society desires to perform for the western section of the state the functions so well performed for the eastern portion by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. The latter organization has been firmly established for many years and has long been equipped with a commodious building and every necessary facility. It has received very properly from the state for its building the sum of $150,000. This is six times the amount received by the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. The latter is in sore need of a big addition to its building. Already the latter is greatly overcrowded and donations of books and relics have had to be refused on this account. The auditorium is also entirely too small and a new one must be provided. With a building of proper size and equipment, the society can greatly increase its usefulness and it is hoped that the present legislature will make the needed appropriation to that end.
Since its reorganization in 1909 the society's membership has increased from 40 to about 700 men and women. It has erected a fine building on Bigelow Boulevard near Parkman Avenue, Pittsburgh, costing with the lot about $43,000. Of this amount $25,000 was received from the state of Pennsylvania and $10,000 from the Pittsburgh Sesqui-Centennial Committee and $5,000 from other sources leaving a balance still due of $3,000.

The society has collected about 1,500 volumes of books and pamphlets in its library. It has also several hundred interesting historical relics and pictures in its museum. Beginning January 1918 it has issued a quarterly magazine—the "Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine." The dues of the society including a subscription to the magazine are $3 a year. There is no initiation fee. All persons interested in the work of the society are eligible to membership. The rooms of the society are open to the public every week day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Miss Emma D. Poole, the librarian being in charge. On Sundays they are open from 2 to 4 p.m. with the secretary in charge. On the last Tuesday of each month, except during the summer and Christmas holidays, the society holds meetings open to the public at which interesting historical papers are read. During the summer one or more pilgrimages are made to historic spots in Western Pennsylvania.

In 1911 the society fathered and managed the celebration of the centennial of steamboat navigation on the Western rivers. A feature of the celebration was the presence of William H. Taft at the christening by Mrs. Nicholas Longworth, of the replica of the first steamboat on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, the "New Orleans." About 300,000 persons witnessed the affair. The steamboat during the month of November made a voyage from Pittsburgh to New Orleans, carrying representatives of the Historical Society and of the city of Pittsburgh, which had appropriated the necessary money for the boat and the celebration. The party everywhere inculcated the study of history, advertised Pittsburgh and advocated the improvement of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and the construction of the Lake Erie and Ohio River Canal. The boat was visited by 75,000 school children and 100,000 men and women and viewed from the shores by multitudes.

In 1913 the society suggested and managed the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the organization of Allegheny County. In 1916 it originated and managed the centennial celebration of the creation of Pittsburgh as a city.
The chief feature was a great historical pageant at Forbes Field attended by 30,000 persons.

The society secured legislation permitting the County Commissioners and the City Council of Pittsburgh to appropriate money to the society on condition that it would provide a place for the public records. Accordingly each of these bodies has appropriated $1,000 annually for the last two years.

From August 1917 to October 1918 the society permitted the use of its first floor and basement by the women of the Red Cross who prepared a great quantity of supplies for our soldiers. Since October 1st the society has permitted the use of the first floor and part of the basement, the balance being used by the Red Cross, by the military students of the University of Pittsburgh. On the evening of December 2, 1918 the society entertained many of these students.

The society has been gathering relics and data of the World War and will assist in the compilation of the history of the conflict particularly the part taken by the soldiers and people of Western Pennsylvania. It has offered its building as the headquarters in the western part of the state for the War Historical Commission.

The first attempt to found a historical society in Pittsburgh was made in 1834. The organization existed for a few years and collected a library of several hundred volumes. The first officers were: Benjamin Bakewell, president, W. W. Fetterman, vice president, John A. Harper, treasurer, Wilson McCandless, secretary and Charles H. Kay, librarian. In 1841-42 the society was temporarily revived, the chief promoter being Rev. George Upfold, rector of Trinity Protestant Episcopal church. Upon his removal to Indianapolis to become the first Bishop of Indiana the organization ceased to exist.

On November 26, 1858, as a result of the centennial celebration of the taking of Fort Duquesne, a meeting was held at the Merchants Exchange, Pittsburgh to organize the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. W. M. Darlington presided at this meeting. On January 10, 1859, the society organized with the following officers: president, Wilson McCandless, vice president, James Veech, Fayette County, Rev. David H. Junkin, Blair County, Rev. William D. Howard, Neville B. Craig and H. M. Brackenridge, Allegheny County, secretary, Daniel L. Eaton, treasurer, Felix R. Brunot. The last meeting of this organization was on April 9, 1860 when Mr. Slagle reported that a charter had been granted to it. The Civil War doubtless caused the society's demise.
A few years after the close of the war the Old Residents Association was organized. This in 1879 was merged in the reorganized Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, which secured a charter in 1888. The successive presidents of this organization were John E. Parke, James P. Fleming, Daniel T. Johnston, Felix R. Brunot, C. S. Fetterman, Rev. A. A. Lambing and Thomas L. Rodgers. The secretaries were W. M. Gormley, James T. Sample, Rev. A. A. Lambing, Miss Jennie L. Lambing, William T. Lyon, Edgar W. Hassler and Edward E. Eggers.

This organization met at various places including Old City Hall, the Pittsburgh Carnegie Library and the Allegheny Carnegie Library. By 1908 it had been reduced to about a dozen active members and about thirty other nominal members. It had no permanent quarters and no library. The Sesqui-Centennial celebration of 1908 vastly increased popular interest in historical matters. As a consequence the men who had suggested and managed that celebration were asked to take charge of the historical society which in May, 1909, was organized with the following officers, the directors and trustees constituting the executive committee: president, Thomas L. Rodgers, vice presidents, Omar S. Decker, Rev. A. A. Lambing, Hon. George B. Orlady, Boyd Crumrine, Dr. S. B. McCormick, chairman executive committee, William H. Stevenson, directors, Gen. A. J. Logan, A. J. Kelly, Jr., Thomas J. Hawkins, Erasmus Wilson and W. G. Wilkins, trustees, Col. James M. Guffey, Edward M. Bigelow and Col., Thomas J. Keenan, secretary, Burd S. Patterson, corresponding secretary, Edward E. Eggers, treasurer, H. M. Landis. In 1911 President Rodgers died and was succeeded by William H. Stevenson who has since held the position.