Report of the Librarian

For year ending April 28, 1931

To the officers and members of the Historical Society of
Western Pennsylvania

As your librarian writes this report, the Society's fine new home stands completed, a monument to the foresight, energy and perseverance of a small group of practical idealists who wished to give Pittsburgh and Pittsburghers something to be proud of. At the happy moment of realization, one feels saddened by the thought that one member of this group, a man for many years vitally and constructively interested in the fortunes of the Society, was not spared to see the culmination of his efforts; I refer to our late beloved President, Mr. William Holmes Stevenson, who died on September 22, 1930.

Just one week after his death, construction work was begun. While everything was progressing briskly roundabout, the inner functions of the Historical Society also proceeded on schedule. To the accompaniment of steam-shoveling, concrete-mixing, riveting, hammering, painting, dust, dirt and general confusion, telephone inquiries were answered, correspondence conducted as before, magazines, notices of meetings and circular letters sent out as usual all of which is a matter of some pride to our department. The only noticeable curtailment of activity was in the matter of visitors, who practically ceased coming as all documents and exhibits of the Society had been stored.

During the past year letters of inquiry on historical matters covered a wide range of subjects, a large percentage of them being from other cities and states. Reference work with detailed answers to correspondents was done on the following subjects: old cannons at the Arsenal, outline history of Pittsburgh, history of the Ohio Valley, the Henry Kirke Porter house in Oakland, for the University of Pittsburgh, history of Birmingham on the Southside (twice), history of the old Monongahela House (twice), the Civil War fortifications in and around Pitts-
burgh, the shape and construction of Fort Pitt (3 times),
The Scotch Irish of Pennsylvania (twice), the Quakers of
Western Pennsylvania, history of old Economy, Forbes
Route, names of officers of the old Eclipse Barge Club,
data on Logstown and Shannopinstown, the Declaration of
Independence, the Sandusky Expedition, Marietta Iron
Works, exact location of Braddock's grave, the Seal of Fort
Duquesne, the old Forsythe cabin on Penn Avenue, a brief
history of McKeesport, etc.

Of more than passing interest were data prepared
for two college professors from the middle western states
who desired material relative to the Mormons in Western
Pennsylvania, with particular reference to Sidney Rigdon
who was so prominent in founding the Mormon Church;
also research work on two women of the Revolution, Mrs.
Greer and Mrs. Warner of Westmoreland and Dauphin
Counties, who accompanied their husbands on Arnold's ill
fated expedition to Quebec, 1775. Origin of names of more
than 100 Allegheny County towns together with brief his-
torical sketches were furnished to the Commissioner of
Crater Lake Park, Oregon, eventually for government ref-
erece files. A correspondent from Virginia wanted bi-
ographical material on Charles Avery, the Pittsburgh drugg-
ist, minister, philanthropist and abolitionist, who was at
the height of his career between 1840 and 1858. An author
connected with the Teachers College at Indianapolis was
assisted with data on General Abner Lacock, a consider-
able part of which our department acquired by correspond-
ence with Abner Lacock's descendants. Sawmill Run, the
origin of its name, sawmills located along its course and
in the vicinity of Pittsburgh during the early days, was
a topic of interest to three correspondents. The exact
route taken by General Anthony Wayne in transporting
his troops from Fort Fayette to Legionville in 1793 and
whether or not it actually passed through Sewickley, was
another interesting topic. Names and locations of var-
ious Indian tribes were sought, principally those about
McKeesport; also material on canal construction and canal
boats along the Western Division of the Pennsylvania
Canal.

Several persons wished to know about the early iron
works of Pittsburgh and vicinity. Two inquiries came
concerning Lafayette's sojourn in Pittsburgh and by what route he journeyed to New York. Source material on the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails, the Western Expansion, the American Revolution, the annexation of Texas, the Gold Rush, Erie Canal, and Civil War was listed for an educator from one of the western states, as was source material for pictures, lantern slides, pamphlets, maps, books, diaries and biographs. The location and construction of the earliest houses in Pittsburgh interested a number of correspondents as did the history of the first Court House and its rebuilding; the Western Penitentiary, the earliest bridges spanning the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers, the history of Andersonville Prison. From London, England, came a letter asking the title of a paper that had been read many years ago by Rev. A. A. Lambing; we were gratified to be able to give this information from an old minute book of the Society.

One unusual correspondent was a French Canadian from the Province of Saskatchewan who wanted to know all about Fort Duquesne, whether anything was left of it, how far from the Battle of Monongahela, all because he was a descendant of one of the men employed in the construction of the old French Fort. A correspondent from a neighboring county wished to know whether a monument had been erected to commemorate the site of an attack upon George Washington by a treacherous Indian while here in 1753. A rather odd inquiry was one regarding the exact moment when President Lincoln arrived in Pittsburgh on his memorable visit, February 14, 1861. For a New Yorker we furnished a brief historical sketch of Coal Hill and the early residents there; to other correspondents we gave the dates of the big flood and fire in Allegheny, 1874. A New York publisher requested a biographical sketch of the late Senator John P. Harris, which through the kind co-operation of Mr. Eugene L. Connelley we were able to give. Two publishing houses in New York and Boston wanted views of early Pittsburgh for use in new United States Histories soon to appear. Photographs of General James O'Hara, Hon. Harmar Denny, Major Ebenezer Denny, and Judge Moses Hampton were loaned for reproduction in local publications. Various pictures and maps were loaned to the United States Bureau
of Mines for reproduction. A Chicago publishing house asked for a copy of the title page of Sherman Day's Outline of History of Pennsylvania to complete an old book. The exact route of the Ohio River Boulevard with names of all historic places traversed, was asked by Ohio and Colorado correspondents, and recently a list of captions for historic markers to be erected along the Allegheny and Ohio River Boulevard as suggested by the late William H. Stevenson, was submitted to us for corrections and additions. Names of Indian chiefs of Western Pennsylvania were suggested as suitable designations for local Boy Scout divisions. Club women were assisted in the preparation of historical talks; names of women of outstanding achievement in Western Pennsylvania prior to 1870 were sought for the Memorial to Pennsylvania Women at Strawberry Mansion, Philadelphia. We suggested Mrs. Jane Swisshelm, pioneer journalist, abolitionist, lecturer, author and Civil War nurse, for this honor, and prepared a biographical sketch with reproduction of the subject's self portrait (1840) which appeared in the Philadelphia Public Ledger.

Interest in family history is very noticeable, from the angle of the biographer as well as of the candidate for membership in patriotic societies. For biographical purposes we have recently collected and given out data on the Robinson, Wilkins and Tannehill families to three individuals, one of them a United States naval officer. We were glad to be able to assist over one hundred correspondents from all states in locating information about their forbears and in this connection we find the Pennsylvania Archives invaluable. For this type of work, steadily increasing, we feel the need of more genealogies and county histories especially of those contiguous to Allegheny County, and are hoping that our reference library may in the future be augmented in this respect.

During the year we cataloged all newspapers, pamphlets, periodicals, almanacs and imprints published prior to 1850. The library has been enriched by a number of new historical publications, presented by generous authors and publishers as well as by a recent gift of old pamphlets, newspapers and imprints, not yet cataloged. Complete sets of the historical magazine have lately been acquired.
by the University of Michigan and the Cleveland Public Library.

In concluding I wish to say that 1930-1931 has been a "normal" year in the historical sense; 2,912 pieces of mail were received, 11,460 pieces sent out. We are gratified to note the interest in historical matters shown by old and young alike, in all walks of life and are happy in "doing our bit" for its furtherance.

Emma D. Poole, Librarian.

April 28, 1931.