NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA IN 1931

The new by-laws of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania provide that the director shall report on the work of the society at its annual meeting. The present director took charge of the affairs of the society on September 1 but this report will take note of important activities throughout the year 1931.

One of several major developments of the year was the reorganization of the society, which was effected by the adoption of a new set of by-laws at the meeting on November 24. These by-laws provide for several classes of members: honorary and corresponding members, who must be resident outside of western Pennsylvania, are not required to pay dues, and have no vote; active members, who are subdivided into patrons, and life, contributing, sustaining, and annual members; and institutional members, divided into permanent, sustaining, and annual, and entitled to representation by a delegate with the right to vote. It is hoped that these provisions will pave the way for a considerably larger income from membership dues. All applications for membership must now be voted upon by the society. The by-laws vest the government of the society in a council composed of the officers and ten trustees. The president, the secretary, the treasurer, and two vice presidents are to be elected by the society for three-year periods and two trustees each year for five-year terms. A director is to be elected by the council and is to administer the affairs of the society under the supervision of the council and of an executive committee consisting of the president, the secretary, the treasurer, the director, and one member appointed by the president. The new by-laws will be printed in full in the next issue of the society's magazine.2

1 Report of the director of the society read at the annual meeting on January 26, 1932.
2 They are printed in the February issue, p. 63–66.
Another aspect of the reorganization has been the concentration of all records of the society in the building. Correspondence and other papers have been assembled from officers and committees and systematically filed, and all the records of membership have been transferred from the office of the treasurer to that of the director, who now receives the dues and transmits them to the treasurer.

A second development of great importance was the setting up on September 1, under the joint auspices of the society and the University of Pittsburgh, of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey, financed for a five-year period mainly by the Buhl Foundation but with the university making a contribution and the society obligated to assist in the support of the project beginning in the third year. The purpose and plans of the survey were set forth by the director in an informal address at the November meeting of the society and that address will soon be printed in the society's magazine. Briefly it may be said here that the survey will endeavor to develop a comprehensive program of collecting materials for and research and writing on the history of western Pennsylvania and to promote historical consciousness on the part of the people of the region. The society's building will serve as headquarters for the survey and the materials collected will become the property of the society.

Still another outstanding development of the year was the completion in August of the addition to the society's building, more than doubling it in size and providing an auditorium, exhibition halls, stack rooms, and store rooms. The expenditures for the addition amounted to $86,698.18, and there remained a balance in the building fund at the end of 1931 of $1,155.73. This is exclusive of the $18,000 received from the Buhl Foundation, which was set aside as an equipment fund. The expenditures from this fund in 1931 amounted to $4,734.31, leaving a balance at the end of the year of $13,265.69. With the assistance of Mr. J. Howard Dice, librarian of the University of Pittsburgh, a contract was let during the summer for metal stacks to provide shelving space for about six thousand books and five thousand newspaper volumes; and the stacks were installed in September.

*It is printed in the February issue, p. 47-62.
Additional equipment, consisting of window shades and curtains, desks, chairs, tables, a special reading stand for bound newspapers, filing cases, typewriters, lamps, a dictating machine, a vacuum cleaner, a heat regulator, and numerous miscellaneous items, has been acquired gradually since September 1. Practically all the furniture is of metal. Special metal shelving, properly protected, will probably be provided in the near future for the manuscript collections; and plans are being worked out for museum cases to be installed in the lobby and the exhibition rooms.

Eight meetings of the society were held in 1931, at which fifteen addresses were delivered. The most notable of these meetings was the one on October 6 for the dedication of the building. Following a dinner in honor of the speakers and invited guests, an audience of over two hundred assembled in the auditorium and lobby of the building for addresses by the Honorable John S. Fisher, former governor of Pennsylvania, Dr. Lee Paul Sieg, dean of the graduate school of the University of Pittsburgh, and the Honorable Henry W. Temple, member of Congress. An account of this meeting with abstracts of the addresses will soon be printed in the magazine, but note should be made here of the very appropriate action taken by the society at the close of the meeting in naming the auditorium “Stevenson Hall” in honor of the late William H. Stevenson, whose vision was largely responsible for the new developments that are here described. The program of addresses and papers for the season 1931–32 was prepared as usual by the program committee, of which Mr. John E. Potter is the chairman, and was printed and distributed to the members in October. Meetings of a number of other organizations have been held in Stevenson Hall and it is evident that the room will be in considerable demand for such purposes as it becomes better known. Such meetings have the advantage to the society of bringing people to its building who might not otherwise come and giving them some conception of the service it is rendering to the community.

The four numbers of the society’s quarterly, the Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, for 1931 contained a total

1 It is printed in the February issue, p. 35–45.
of ten articles including two that ran through all four issues. Mr. William J. Martin, who has ably edited the magazine for three years, withdrew from the editorship at the close of the year, and the director has been designated as editor. The committee on publication or "board of editors," as it is now designated, has approved extensive changes in the format of the magazine and the inclusion of departments devoted to notes and documents, reviews of books, notes on the society's work, and news of historical activities. Specifications for the printing of the magazine were drawn up and submitted to a number of printers, and the contract for printing for 1932 was let to the lowest bidder. The preparation of copy for the first issue of 1932 has been unavoidably delayed but part of it is now in type and it will be ready for distribution in the near future. Plans are under consideration for the publication of a handbook descriptive of the society's building, collections, and activities, and explaining the terms and advantages of membership; and it is hoped that, before long, the society may branch out into the field of book publication.

The membership of the society on January 1, 1932, amounted to 565, of whom 1 was a life member, 21 were sustaining members, and 543 were annual members. The number of new members enrolled during the year was 36, but 22 members were lost by death and 22 by resignation, and 54 others who were in good standing in 1930 failed to pay their dues for 1931. The net loss for the year, therefore, amounts to 62. Plans are being made for an active membership campaign in the near future, however, and it is hoped that, with the cooperation of the present members, the number can be more than doubled during the current year. A list of the members who died in 1931 will be published in the forthcoming issue of the magazine.\(^5\)

The staff paid by the society still consists of a single person, the librarian, but the director and curator of the survey have been given similar titles on the society's staff and the survey has supplied a porter as its contribution to the maintenance of the building. The office secretary and several part-time or temporary assistants employed by the survey might also be said to be working for the society. In fact it has been found impossible

\(^5\) It is in the February issue, p. 74.
in practice to distinguish between the work of the two organizations, for the survey must work with and develop the society, its collections, and its facilities, if the survey is to accomplish its purposes. It is greatly to be hoped, however, that provision can be made before long for additions to the staff paid by the society, so that more of the survey's funds may be devoted to the work of collection and research.

The society's library consists of some twelve hundred books and pamphlets, about three hundred volumes of newspapers, a mass of unbound historical and other magazines, and small miscellaneous collections of maps and manuscripts. As practically all of it has been accumulated by gift, without active and systematic solicitation, it is a very miscellaneous collection, lacking many of the most important books relating to the region, but, on the other hand, including a number of rarities and other items of unusual interest. Fortunately this library has been supplemented temporarily by the deposit in the building of a part of the Darlington Memorial Library belonging to the University of Pittsburgh and consisting of some 2,700 books and about 150 volumes of newspapers, many of them of great importance for the history of the region. Gifts to the library during the year included 143 bound volumes of Pittsburgh newspapers from the Carnegie Library of Braddock; the new four-volume work entitled *Pittsburgh of Today, Its Resources and People*, by Frank C. Harper, from the author; some fifteen books and pamphlets from Dr. Thomas Diller, a number of rarities from Mr. Thomas Mellon II, and some forty items from miscellaneous sources. The most notable addition to the manuscripts consists of a large collection of papers of the Harmony Society, deposited by Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Duss of Ambridge, but several small groups of papers have been received including material on Fort Fayette, General James Wilkinson, and the Forbes Road. An interesting addition to the museum collections is the brass tablet from the U.S. SS. "Pittsburgh" commemorating its services in the World War, obtained from the navy department at the solicitation of the president of the society.

A system is being worked out for more adequately recording and marking additions to the collections and filing data about
them. The systematic solicitation of gifts and exchanges, especially of current publications and of museum material, would cause the collections to grow rapidly, but much of the most important material can be obtained only by purchase and well-rounded collections cannot be built up without funds for buying.

When the survey was established in September it quickly became evident that one of its first tasks would have to be to put the society's collections of books, pamphlets, maps, manuscripts, and newspapers into condition for effective use in research work. Accordingly the services of a trained cataloguer were engaged, the books were shelved on the new stacks, and the work of classifying and cataloguing was started. By the end of the year 825 volumes had been recorded in the accession book, 627 volumes had been classified and catalogued, and 2,212 cards had been made and filed in the permanent catalogue, which includes in one alphabet entries for authors, titles, and subjects. Fortunately the books in the Darlington collection have been catalogued by the university library before they were sent over, and the card catalogue was deposited with them.

A beginning has also been made in the work of assembling, sorting, filing, and listing manuscript materials. Records, correspondence, and papers relating primarily to the activities of the society have been segregated from the collections proper; and secondary materials, consisting mostly of papers read before the society or written for its magazine, have been listed and filed by themselves. The miscellaneous original documents have been arranged in a chronological file and a beginning has been made in the sorting and filing of some of the small groups of original papers and the large collection of Harmony Society Papers. The cleaning, pressing, repairing, classifying, and cataloguing of manuscripts is very technical work and only slow progress can be made with untrained assistants.

A considerable number of periodicals, mostly the publications of other historical societies, have been accumulated by exchange and gift, but have not been bound. These have now been sorted and listed, and such of them as are appropriate for the society's collection and are sufficiently complete should be bound and added to the catalogued library as soon as funds are available.
An effort should also be made to complete the more important files. The stock of the society's magazine has been sorted and inventoried and it appears that considerable quantities of most of the issues are available for exchange or sale. An effort should be made to get as many of these as possible into libraries where they will be of use. The sorting of the collection of pamphlets and miscellaneous printed matter has been begun. Some of the more important pamphlets should be bound in boards or in pamphlet binders and classified and catalogued as books and the remainder of the material should be grouped by subjects and catalogued by groups. Pictures and newspaper clippings have been segregated but no arrangement or cataloguing of them has been attempted as yet. Some of the museum material has been arranged in temporary exhibits, part of the remainder has been roughly sorted, but some is still packed in boxes in the basement. A part of the collection of framed pictures has been hung temporarily in the large room over the auditorium. As soon as possible an inventory will be made of the museum collections and framed pictures, and plans will be worked out for installing systematically arranged exhibits in the new cases that are to be provided.

No adequate account of the service rendered to the public during the year is possible. It may be noted, however, that despite the confusion attendant on building operations some three hundred people called at the building in search of historical and genealogical information, and numerous requests for information by mail and telephone were complied with. As the facilities of the society become better known there will undoubtedly be a considerable increase in the number of readers.

No attempt will be made to present here a comprehensive report of those aspects of the work of the survey that do not directly affect the society. It might be noted in passing, however, that a beginning has been made in compiling a comprehensive bibliography of western Pennsylvania; that Dr. Alfred P. James, who is serving as research associate, has made inventories and calendars of thousands of unpublished documents relating to the early history of the region from originals and reproductions available in Washington and is going abroad soon to continue
this work in London and Paris; and that Mr. Alston G. Field, as fellow of the survey, has listed the archives and other historical resources of one county, and is compiling a bibliography of newspapers and periodicals published in western Pennsylvania, with an inventory of extant files. Plans are also being made for inaugurating in the near future a special project for collecting materials and promoting research in the history of the eastern European elements in the population of the region.  

The financial status of the society has been set forth in the treasurer's report. Although a comfortable balance was available in the general fund at the end of the year, it is clear that the present income of the society, amounting to less than six thousand dollars a year, will not support any appreciable expansion of its activities. That income will doubtless be increased somewhat by the growth of the membership; but, as copies of the magazine will have to be printed for the new members, the gain will be small unless a considerable proportion of them contribute more than the annual dues. This is obviously not a proper time to ask for increases in the appropriations received from the city and the county, although they are greatly exceeded by the expenditures for historical work of a number of less populous and less wealthy American communities. A proper solution, in part at least, of the financial problem, would seem to be the building up of an endowment or permanent fund. Most of the important historical societies of the country have such funds, some of them amounting to over half a million dollars. The new by-laws of our society provide that fees received from patrons and from life and permanent institutional members shall be placed in a permanent fund, and it is confidently believed that people of Pittsburgh and vicinity who realize the value of systematic work in regional history will soon build up, by gifts and bequests, a respectable endowment for the society. Only when it is adequately financed will the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania be able to assume the place among the leading historical societies of the country that the importance of its field of work would warrant.

Solon J. Buck

*See post, p. 171