THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA IN 1934

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The society entered upon the year 1934 with no certain prospect of being able to carry on its usual activities without curtailment and to meet its obligation to the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey. It has done both and faces the new year somewhat better prepared for the near future but without adequate provision for the time, about a year and a half hence, when the survey will have rounded out its five-year term and the society, so far as is now known, will be left to carry on alone. In the meantime another year of joint activity on the part of the society and the survey has served further to demonstrate the need for and value of sustained efforts in the field of western Pennsylvania history and to arouse the expectations of a growing clientele, which the society would not willingly disappoint. For the coming year the society can at least continue to follow the Scriptural injunction to cast bread upon the waters in the hope that it may be found again, in the form of more adequate community support, after not too many days.

In reviewing the activities and accomplishments of the past year no attempt will be made to distinguish sharply between those of the society and those of the survey, so closely are they intertwined. It may be well to recall, however, that the survey provides the greater part of the staff of the society and to note assistance received from other quarters during the year. All members of the survey staff help in various ways to advance the work and interests of the society and five of them discharge the duties, respectively, of director, assistant director, librarian, editorial assistant, and office secretary on the society’s staff. The society now contributes to the survey fund a little more than the equivalent of the salary

1Report of the acting director of the society read at the annual meeting on January 29, 1935. Ed.
of one of these; it continues to provide directly for a custodian of the museum and a porter; and for a period of three months early in the year it employed the services of a special membership secretary. Some little assistance in the care of the collections and in typing copy for projected publications—assistance about equivalent to that of one full-time year-round worker—has been received without cost to the society or the survey from volunteer helpers and from university students and others assigned to such work in connection with government relief projects. On June 1 the assistant director of the society was made acting director in order that the director might have more time to devote to research and writing for the survey.

The society's collections have been enriched by many additions, most of which have been reported in the magazine and need not be listed here. The number of accessioned books and pamphlets in the society's library was increased by 897, thus bringing the total to 4,182, and the number of periodicals regularly received is now 165. To the newspaper collection have been added fifty-eight bound volumes and originals or photostatic copies of upwards of five hundred issues, ranging in date from the earliest times of newspaper publications to the recent past and representing not only Pittsburgh but other western Pennsylvania communities such as Butler, Erie, Greensburg, and Somerset. Thousands of original manuscripts and hundreds of miniature photographic reproductions have been acquired, among which are a number of notable collections of personal, family, business, and organization papers and not a few individually significant documents. The number of museum objects received was 260 and the number of objects loaned to the museum 45. Most of the newly acquired materials of all types were obtained by gift, loan, or exchange, but certain needed items or collections of printed and manuscript materials not thus obtainable were purchased with money drawn from a dwindling equipment fund. Some of the gifts and loans have come unsolicited but many have been prompted through correspondence, personal interviews, and field trips to such distant points as Butler, Meadville, Harrisburg, and Salem, Ohio.

In the care of the collections the aim is to make all incoming material available for use at once and then to carry on the oftentimes extensive
work of arranging, listing or cataloguing, and filing in detail as soon as practicable. The year's acquisitions of books and pamphlets have been accessioned and arranged and listed alphabetically, but the considerable task of cataloguing them has in large measure been deferred because of the pressure of work upon the librarian in his capacity as research associate of the survey. Newspapers have been listed and filed as received; the arrangement and listing of the society's voluminous collection of files of Hungarian newspapers and periodicals published in America have been continued and completed; and the files of unbound American newspapers have been assembled and filed in boxes specially provided for the purpose. Incoming manuscripts, usually folded when received, have been opened out and filed flat in dust-proof cases; some of them have been cleaned and pressed—not "washed and ironed" as one reporter put it; and progress has been made toward complete organization of some of the larger collections previously acquired, notably that of the records and papers of the James Rees and Sons Company. The new museum material has been catalogued by the custodian as received and the objects that have been put on exhibition have been supplied with appropriate labels. All the collections may be said to be adequately protected from avoidable deterioration except a considerable number of books and newspaper volumes that are badly in need of rebinding, the cost of which, in the light of other needs, has seemed prohibitive.

An increasingly large public is discovering and making use of the resources thus assembled and placed at its disposal by the society. The number of readers rose from 478 in 1933 to 672 in 1934, and a corresponding increase appears to have occurred in the uncounted number of inquiries received by mail and telephone. The number of visitors to the museum, exclusive of attendants at meetings in Stevenson Hall, increased from 548 in 1933 to 1,457 in 1934, and of the latter number 497 came in groups from schools and clubs in response to a widely distributed invitation from the custodian. During most of the year the library hours were extended to include Saturday afternoons, but during the winter season, as a measure of economy, this extension has been made only by appointment and in favor particularly of readers who are not free to visit the library at other times.
The society’s disposition to coöperate so far as possible with all other agencies of like purpose serves further to extend the sphere of its usefulness. In response to a request from the Complete-the-Cathedral Committee of the University of Pittsburgh, made in connection with a project for memorializing men and women prominent in the history of Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania, the librarian compiled a biographical index of several hundred names with the aid of which a special committee of the society selected the hundred citizens considered most worthy of the proposed honor. The society continues to provide headquarters for the conduct of a survey of historical records in Allegheny County, which has been carried on intermittently as a government relief project since December, 1933, and is markedly supplementing the efforts of the society and the survey in the same field. Special assistance has also been rendered to workers on a number of other relief projects, including those engaged in a survey of materials available in Allegheny County relating to American military and naval history, and close relations have been maintained with the Western Pennsylvania Architectural Survey, a project financed by the Buhl Foundation. Groups from various institutions and organizations of allied interests occasionally hold their meetings in Stevenson Hall and a university history class has met there weekly since the opening of the college year last fall.

The quarterly publication of the society, the Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, has continued to appear in the specially designed format adopted in 1933 but with its publication dates changed to March, June, September, and December, in order that each issue might include accounts of the activities of the preceding quarter of the calendar year. The four numbers include twelve major articles, ten contributions published under the heading "Notes and Documents," twenty-one book reviews, and many items relating to activities of the society and the survey and to developments in the field of western Pennsylvania history generally. Bound copies of the year’s volume, complete with title-page, table of contents, and index, will shortly be available, in exchange for the four unbound numbers and fifty cents to cover the cost of binding.

The research work of the survey staff during the past year has been concentrated largely on the preparation of a book to be entitled "The
Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania,” which will deal with
the establishment of human society in the region and its social, economic,
political, and cultural development to about 1812. This book, which is
approaching completion and is to be the first major publication of the
survey, is being written by the director, but other members of the staff
have been aiding him in assembling and organizing material for the va-
rious chapters. The drafting of a book entitled “Whiskey Rebels: The
Story of a Frontier Uprising” was completed by Dr. Baldwin early in
the year, and the revision of the manuscript and preparation of copy for
printing is nearly completed. Dr. Downes’ study of “Indian Relations in
the Upper Ohio Valley, 1774–1795” is awaiting editorial revision; and
Dr. Ferguson reports progress on his study of “Western Pennsylvania
Politics, 1787–1824.” Among other projects to which some attention
has been given are a popular narrative of the evolution of Pittsburgh
from a frontier trading post to the metropolitan center of the present
day; a collection of travelers’ accounts, tentatively entitled “Pen Pic-
tures of Western Pennsylvania”; and a collection of letters and other
documents, mostly unpublished, relating to the British régime in the up-
per Ohio Valley.

Realizing that the work of the society and the survey is a part of the
general stream of historical activities, the members of the staff have kept
in touch with such activities by attending meetings of state and national
societies and by contributing articles and reviews to historical publica-
tions. The director represented the society at the annual meeting of the
Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies in January, four mem-
ers of the staff attended the meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical As-
sociation in Harrisburg in May, and nearly the entire staff journeyed to
Washington for the meeting of the American Historical Association in
December. The Pennsylvania Historical Association has accepted the
invitation of the society and the history department of the University of
Pittsburgh to hold its next meeting in Pittsburgh on April 19 and 20,
and the president and acting director of the society are serving as chair-
man and secretary, respectively, of the committee on local arrangements
for the meeting. The director has served as chairman of the section on
historical and philological sciences of the American Association for the
Advancement of Science, as chairman of committees of the American
and Mississippi Valley historical associations, and as a member of the council of the Pennsylvania Historical Association. Three papers by Dr. Downes and one by Mr. Field have appeared in historical magazines during the year, and a journal edited by the director has been published in the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society.

Throughout the year much of the time and attention of officers and members of the staff of the society has been devoted to devising and trying out ways and means of making the society more generally known, increasing its membership, and raising needed funds. In addition to six regular monthly meetings, four special events were arranged—the centennial dinner, an afternoon tea, a luncheon, and a joint meeting with certain sections of the American Association for the Advancement of Science—all planned with a view to reaching people not yet actively interested in the work of the society. The summer pilgrimage to Bedford, the third in the series of annual historical tours conducted jointly by the society and the summer session of the University of Pittsburgh, attracted many non-members. The society's collections have been extensively drawn upon for outside exhibits: the museum alone furnished a total of 440 objects for such purposes during the year. Some of these materials were loaned for exhibition by other institutions but the greater number were used in displays arranged by the society itself in such locations as the windows of the Farmers Bank Building, the lobby of the Union Trust Company, the county fair, and the rooms of the Chamber of Commerce, where many thousands viewed them. Through radio talks, addresses before meetings of other organizations, numerous releases to the daily papers, and contributions to other local publications, the society has further been kept before the public eye. At the same time there has been carried on a continuous and at times extensive campaign to enroll new members by direct solicitation, for the most part by mail, of thousands listed as likely prospects.

Largely as a result of these efforts, the society gained 205 new members, reinstated 6 former members, and, despite a loss of 70, made a net gain of 141. Eighteen members were lost by death, 18 by resignation, and 34 because of failure to pay their dues for 1934. The membership as of January 1, 1935, was 636, including one corresponding, 4 institutional, and 631 active members. Of the active members, 7 were life, 4
contributing, 44 sustaining, 570 annual, and 6 associate. Eleven members transferred to a higher paying class of membership, thus increasing the number of contributing members by two, that of sustaining members by nine, and the yearly income of the society by about a hundred dollars. Probably comparison with membership statistics of most other historical societies these days would reveal the gain made here as exceptional, but it falls far short of the goal set at the beginning of the year and of the growth that the society may reasonably hope yet to achieve.

As a result of the increase in membership, the income of the general fund for the year rose to $4,754, an increase of $733 over that for 1933. The expenditures from this fund, mainly for salaries, the maintenance of the building, and the publication of the magazine, amounted, however, to $5,641, an excess of $883 over income; with the result that the balance on hand at the end of the year was reduced to $1,148. If the income for 1935 equals that of 1934, it will be possible to get through the year without curtailing activities, and it is to be hoped that the income may be increased at least to the point where it will equal the necessary expenditures.

In the director's report for 1933 attention was called to the fact that the society was obligated to contribute twenty-five hundred dollars to the survey fund for the year beginning September 1, 1934, and five thousand dollars for the succeeding year, and it was stated that an effort would be made to raise by subscription a special fund to enable the society to meet this obligation. A special fund committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Honorable John S. Fisher and subscriptions were solicited during the summer. The work was hampered by the absence from the city of many of the prospective contributors and of members of the committee, but by August the society was able to give assurances that it would meet its obligation for the year 1934-35. The campaign was continued during the fall and by the end of the year a total of $4,558 had been subscribed or contributed to the fund. Arrangements have now been made for an intensive effort to obtain the three thousand dollars needed to complete the fund by personal calls on prospective contributors, and it is believed that this will be accomplished in a few weeks.

The survey, with the consequent expansion of the activity and serv-
ices of the society, was and is in the nature of an experiment to determine whether or not Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania can be induced to support a program of vigorous and effective cultivation of the field of regional history. It is unfortunate, of course, that the period of the experiment happens to coincide with that of the greatest depression that the country has ever known; but there is still ground for hoping that, by the end of the five-year period, the society’s place in the community will be so firmly established that public or private support will be forthcoming to enable it to operate on a scale commensurate with the wealth and importance of the region that it serves.