

# NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

## THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA IN 1935<sup>1</sup>

ANOTHER year of fruitful association with the University of Pittsburgh and the Buhl Foundation in the conduct of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey has brought to the society some growth in membership, not inconsiderable additions to its collections, and widening opportunities for service to students of western Pennsylvania history and to the public at large.

Although the claims of other activities prevented continuation of the large-scale membership campaign inaugurated the year before, the society gained 76 new members, reinstated 5 former members, and, despite a loss of 44, made a net gain of 37. Thirteen members were lost by death, 20 by resignation, and 11 because of failure to pay their dues for 1935. The membership as of January 1, 1936, was 669 and included 1 corresponding, 4 institutional, and 664 active members. Of the active members, 9 were life, 4 contributing, 49 sustaining, 592 annual, and 10 associate. Not a few of the new members were brought in by older members, and five of the latter transferred to a higher paying class of membership.

The collections of the society have continued to grow through gifts, loans, exchanges, and purchases, as reported from time to time in the quarterly magazine. The number of accessioned books and pamphlets in the library was increased by 804, thus bringing the total number of books to 4,804. Included in the increment is a collection of genealogical works acquired in recognition of a not inconsiderable local interest in family history. Among additions to the newspaper collection special mention may be made of a file of forty-five volumes of the *Pennsylvania Farmer* and its predecessors, dating from 1886; and among acquisitions of personal papers, attention may be called to a considerable addition to the society's

<sup>1</sup> Report of the director of the society read at the annual meeting on January 28, 1936. *Ed.*

collection of the papers of Colonel Dunning McNair and of his son, Colonel Dunning R. McNair, and to a portion of the extensive papers of the late Dr. William J. Holland now on deposit in the society's manuscript files. Another important acquisition is that of a collection of original Butler County records of the early nineteenth century, comprising some forty-seven bound volumes and several thousand official papers. Still other materials, too numerous and varied to describe here, were acquired through the continued use of the society's equipment for making miniature reproductions on film. To the museum have come 178 objects as gifts and 60 as loans—objects ranging from a striking group of period costumes to a single spoon made by an early Pittsburgh silversmith.

To make room for these expanding collections two additional stacks of steel shelving were installed in the manuscript division and another wall display case in the museum. Progress is to be reported, moreover, in the seemingly dull but indispensable work of organizing and filing incoming material and of otherwise putting and keeping all the collections in serviceable order. It is an endless task, but the library has been made more useful by the accessioning during the year of 804 volumes and the cataloguing of 772, and the museum is more effectively operated by reason of the accessioning and cataloguing of 300 objects, the arrangement work done for 8 special exhibits, the rearrangement of 8 exhibition cases, and the relocation of 55 pictures and other wall exhibits.

Both the library and the museum continued to draw serious students and interested visitors in large numbers, and uncounted inquiries were received and answered by mail and telephone. Visitors to the museum during the year numbered 948, of whom 154 came in groups from schools. The usual count of visitors to the library suffered occasional interruptions under pressure of other work, but it seems certain that the average, at least, of recent years was maintained, and it is believed that an increasingly large proportion of the readers came for the purpose of systematic and sustained research in the wealth of source material to be found here.

With the other ways in which the society has continued to stimulate interest in and disseminate knowledge of western Pennsylvania history—

through the medium of its quarterly magazine, its regular monthly meetings during most of the year, its annual summer tour conducted jointly with the summer session of the University of Pittsburgh—the members are already familiar. Suffice it to say that in planning such activities a special effort was and is being made to discover, encourage, and bring to a focus that interest in the past that permeates the public consciousness these days, finds partial expression here and there, but nowhere appears as an effective, community-wide force. It was this idea, for example, that prompted the recent stock-taking rally of historically minded societies and groups in the Pittsburgh district.

The society completed the raising of the \$7,500 it was obligated to pay in support of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey with the help of additional gifts, ranging from one hundred to five hundred dollars, from a number of its trustees and others. It will share in the credit for the ten volumes of western Pennsylvania history to be completed before the end of the year, as described at the last meeting of the society and in a recent issue of the magazine (*ante*, 18: 296).

On the other hand the society's expansion of activities in recent years has been largely an outgrowth of its association with the survey; its own operating funds have been depleted; and it faces the likelihood, if not the certainty, of having to carry on alone when the survey rounds out its five-year term next August.

Here, then, is a challenge and an opportunity for the new year. Here, in the keeping of the society, are rich and growing collections of historical materials upon the use and extension of which teachers, students, and laymen have come to depend; here is the only agency continuously, exclusively, and, it is hoped, permanently devoted to promoting interest in and knowledge of the inexhaustible treasures of our lengthening past; here, a potential clearing house of information about, and perhaps a coordinator of the efforts of, other local historical agencies; here, a regional society to which local societies in its territory have begun to look for inspiration and guidance; here, a society of which others of its kind throughout the Commonwealth and beyond have come to expect noteworthy accomplishments.

Shall any of these ends be abandoned, these services curtailed, these expectations disappointed? There are seven months in which to make answer, and there is every indication that the answer will be no, that the leaders of the society, with the backing of all its members, will find ways and means for the society to carry on, whether alone or in continued association with other agencies of like purpose.

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