THE SURVEY IN RETROSPECT
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ON AUGUST 31 the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey completed its five-year program of extensive and intensive cultivation of the field of western Pennsylvania history. It is too early fully to measure the results of its labors, for an important part of its work was to prepare the soil, plant the seed, and otherwise promote a continual and outspreading burgeoning of crops in a field almost virgin to start with and one endlessly expanding in time. Nevertheless the survey produced a bountiful crop of its own, which may now be described, together with a number of less obvious but important accomplishments in the way of long-range planning and preparation for other harvests to come.

The survey, it will be recalled, was launched in the fall of 1931 under the auspices of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and the University of Pittsburgh with generous financial assistance from the Buhl Foundation of Pittsburgh. To its support the foundation contributed annual payments totaling seventy thousand dollars, besides providing a special equipment fund of eighteen thousand dollars at the outset; the university contributed a total of twenty-five thousand dollars and the advantages of long experience in historical research; and the historical society provided the sum of seventy-five hundred dollars, the support of its organization, and the use of its newly enlarged building. In general charge of the undertaking was a joint board of control composed of five representatives of the society, including its president, in which capacity the late William H. Stevenson, the Honorable Robert M. Ewing, and former Governor John S. Fisher served successively, and four representatives of the university, including the chancellor, Dr. John G. Bowman. The president of the society was chairman and Dr. John W. Oliver, head of the history department in the university, was vice chairman of the board.
Actual direction of the work was placed in the hands of Dr. Solon J. Buck, who, as professor of history at the University of Minnesota, superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, and author of a number of important works of American history, had gained a national reputation in his field as a scholar, writer, and administrator. For four years, or until he was called to the position of director of publications in the National Archives, Dr. Buck, with the assistance of a small professional staff, directed the work of the survey, gave a course in western Pennsylvania history at the university, and during the greater part of the period directed most of the activities of the historical society. In the fifth and last year of the survey it fell to the lot of his successors—the writer as acting director and Dr. Leland D. Baldwin as assistant director—to press to a conclusion a development already far on the way to fruition. To Dr. Baldwin at this latter stage were assigned the tasks of supervising the completion of the research and writing projects in hand, of inaugurating and directing such others as could be completed within the year, of writing a book or two himself, and of continuing the course in western Pennsylvania history at the university.

The occasion for the institution of the survey and its central aim were graphically set forth at the organization meeting of the survey board of control by Mr. Charles F. Lewis, director of the Buhl Foundation, as follows:

It is hardly necessary to say in this group what we all know to be true: first, that Pittsburgh has an exceedingly rich historical tradition; and second, that this heritage has not yet been adequately understood by our own people or interpreted to the world. We cannot forget, too, that history is a continuing process and that Pittsburgh, today, is making history just as significant and important as the chapters written in past generations. A study of Pittsburgh history, then, will bring us not a view of a dead past, but a majestic and living panorama of all that the city has been, is, and aspires to be. We have faith that as this panorama in its meaning is ever present in the consciousness of our people, we shall all be stimulated to better and higher living for the promotion of the essential values of this district and for the releasing of its greatest possible contribution to the world.¹

¹ Minutes of the board of control of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey on file at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.
In pursuit of this ideal, it was proposed that the survey conduct a vigorous program of research and writing of the history of the Pittsburgh district at three levels, the research level, the public or popular level, and the public school level, and further, that at each level the work be done "with scientific exactitude," to quote the same speaker further, "but with an earnest effort to catch the full inspirational value of the enterprise as a substantial contribution to a spirit of effective citizenship."

Attention naturally centered on, but was not confined to, Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh district, and as further defined in practice the end sought was approached in a number of ways. So far from attempting the task of fully and finally exploiting its field, or of producing a comprehensive history of western Pennsylvania in a limited time and through its own efforts alone, the survey engaged in large-scale pioneering somewhat after the manner of a colonization company entering the trans-Allegheny region in the early days. It followed in the path of explorer, trader, soldier, and individual settler; spied out the land as a whole and surveyed and developed selected parts of it; assisted the fellow-enterpriser; advertised to the world the advantages of the new land of opportunity and at the same time sought to make lasting provision for that land’s continued development. In other words the survey was an educational and inspirational force as well as a research and history-writing agency, and as such it worked, to no small extent, with and through the historical society; it carried on most of the society’s activities throughout the five-year period and steadily expanded them, both as a form of direct service to the community in line with the survey’s own central aim, and also as a means of establishing the society more firmly as the principal permanent promoter of historical interests and activities in the region.

The procedure adopted involved a number of separate undertakings, preliminary or supplementary to the actual work of writing, to nearly every one of which the survey might profitably have devoted all its en-

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2 For a full exposition of the procedure tentatively outlined at the outset, see Solon J. Buck, "A Program for Research in Western Pennsylvania History," ante, 15:47-62 (February, 1932).
ergies, the full possibilities of none of which could be exhausted, and the character and significance of all of which will appear, it is hoped, as the record of tangible results achieved unfolds.

To the historian, "spying out the land" means first of all finding out what has already been made known about his subject through the medium of published histories and other secondary works, and exploring the resources of his field in the way of raw materials—contemporary records, that is, or by-products of the actual business of living, such as old letters, diaries, account books, reports, newspapers, maps, pamphlets, and a seemingly endless variety of other manuscript and printed materials. To the survey—lest each of its writers and others to come after them be compelled to go through the whole time-consuming and laborious process for their own limited purposes alone—such exploration meant, in addition to a multitude of lesser operations, a systematic combing of library catalogues, back files of historical journals, dealers' lists, and the like; a constant watch over the current output, printed and unprinted, of numerous publishers and research agencies; an investigation of leading American, Canadian, British, and French libraries and archives made by Dr. Alfred P. James as a representative of the survey while on sabbatical leave from his duties as a professor of history at the university; canvasses of the libraries and newspaper offices of the region by questionnaire; a sample survey of all the historical resources of a limited area; a continual lookout for materials in private hands; and recording, classifying, and to some extent publishing the mass of detailed information so acquired.

The results in this direction are a number of extremely valuable tools of research, which of course were extensively used by the survey in the fabrication of its own products and which will always save the judicious laborer in this field an immense amount of preliminary work. As described in the language of the trade, these tools, all serviceable, but brought to varying degrees of sharpness and finish, include: a comprehensive card bibliography and finding list, duplicated in separate alphabetical and topical or chronological arrangements, of printed books, pamphlets, and articles, both source and secondary, in the field of west-
ern Pennsylvania history, the basis for which was supplied under a standing order with the Library of Congress for relevant entries; a classified working bibliography of the early period in list form; an extensive card calendar or descriptive chronological list of unpublished materials to be found outside the region; a calendar of documents, published or unpublished, relating to the history of the region in the eighteenth century; an inventory of newspaper holdings in Allegheny County; a bibliography and location list of western Pennsylvania newspapers published outside of that county before 1860; a location list of all extant issues of the pioneer newspaper of the region, the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, to 1800; a general inventory of the historical resources of Somerset County, including public archives; inventories of manuscript and other holdings of local depositories, including, principally, the historical society, the university, and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh; and numerous lesser tools of the same kinds—all now permanently available in the library of the historical society. In short, a substantial beginning was made toward providing a truly comprehensive, centralized guide as necessary and useful in its way as a classified city directory.

Moreover, the bibliography of early western Pennsylvania history was mimeographed in a limited edition for office use and the use of teachers and students of the subject at the university, and two of the guides, an *Inventory of the Manuscript and Miscellaneous Collections of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, January, 1933. 11 p.) and an *Inventory of Files of American Newspapers in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, August, 1933. 34 p.) were multigraphed and printed by the offset process, respectively, and distributed among the leading college, university, historical, and public libraries of the country. The advantages of such distribution will be the better appreciated when it is considered, for example, that in a single recent year there were known to be as many as forty-three candidates for the doctor's degree, in fourteen widely scattered universities, engaged in the study and exposition of subjects relating directly or indirectly to the history of western Pennsylvania or to that of the commonwealth as a whole.
Along with the work of exploration in such an undertaking goes that of assembling the available materials, so far as possible, in order both to spare the historian needless traveling hither and yon and to ensure the preservation of unique or rare items and collections that might otherwise disappear eventually. It is true that not a little of this work in the western Pennsylvania field had already been done. The survey had at hand from the outset, in the library of the historical society, the society’s own collections and, throughout most of the five-year period, a loaned collection of several thousand books, bound newspapers, and other western Pennsylvanian from the Darlington Memorial Library of the University of Pittsburgh. Moreover, at the university library itself and at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, neither far distant, were available other important collections of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania materials. But much remained to be done in developing the library of the society, the permanent depository of the survey’s collections, particularly from the standpoint of the needs of research, both immediate and remote.

Accordingly the survey devoted no small part of its energies to the building up of its own, and therefore of the society’s, collections. Obviously, unique materials already assembled elsewhere in libraries and archives could not be “collected” outright, but copies, sets, or files of books, newspapers, periodicals, and other materials originally produced in quantity could be and were acquired here and there, by gift, loan, or exchange and to a limited extent by purchase. Moreover, some of the unknown but presumably great quantities of original papers still in private hands, waiting to be disgorged from old trunk or desk, attic or storeroom, were discovered by the survey and acquired or borrowed when their owners could be persuaded of the advantages, both to themselves and to the community, of placing such treasures in a fireproof public depository. Exceptionally useful but non-collectible materials were reproduced by the making of carefully collated transcripts, the purchase of photostats, or by the use of apparatus, with which the survey early equipped itself, for making miniature reproductions on film.

A noteworthy expansion of the collections at the Historical Building resulted, the progress of which has been reported in some detail from
time to time in this magazine. Briefly, a more or less miscellaneous library of about two thousand volumes, including not a few non-historical works, was systematically developed into a working library of approximately five thousand volumes, including back files and current issues of many historical journals likely to contain materials relevant to the ends in view. A collection of some three hundred bound volumes of newspapers, mostly Pittsburgh, was greatly enlarged by the acquisition, notably, of files of western Pennsylvania newspapers published outside of Pittsburgh and not to be found in other Pittsburgh depositories, and of extensive files of back numbers and current issues of many foreign-language newspapers and periodicals that reflect the part played by the newer Americans in the later history of the region. And, most important of all, a handful of documents, consisting chiefly of none-too-informative deeds, commissions, and other papers rightly treasured for their antiquity or associations, grew into a manuscript collection of upwards of one hundred and fifty thousand items of such character as to make of it a veritable mine of information. Included among the latter are the following outstanding groups: a collection of transcripts or film reproductions of hundreds of documents of western Pennsylvania interest among the papers of Colonel Henry Bouquet; considerable groups of personal and business papers of prominent western Pennsylvanians such as James O'Hara, Ebenezer and Harmar Denny, John and William Thaw, Dunning McNair, John Covode, John Harper, and James R. Mellon; voluminous transcripts of the records of early churches in the Redstone Presbytery and in Somerset County; thousands of the papers of the celebrated Harmony Society; and a mass of business records, an accumulation of many years in the office of the James Rees and Sons Company, Pittsburgh boat and engine builders of earlier days. Here are materials of both immediate and lasting usefulness, for they are of a durable sort that can be used again and again for varying and perhaps unforeseen purposes as new times or new points of view develop new patterns and discover new values in them.

The organization and care of all this material in itself constituted another preliminary task of major proportions. It involved, in the first
place, the equipping of a newly and considerably enlarged building and
the reinstalling of the collections previously assembled there. Not only
had the latter been stowed away or disarranged in the course of building
operations, but they also required organization in accordance with mod-
er standards of library and archival practice, and of course the great
volume of incoming materials, whether received bit by bit or in lots in
all manner of arrangements or lack of arrangement, called for the same
treatment. The reader may be spared the details of the many successive,
repetitious, and varied operations through which such materials are
placed at the command of the user, and it will suffice here to say that
the survey brought the more important of them under rather complete
control and on the whole developed a fairly well organized and imple-
mented warehouse and workshop for research in its field.

All three major undertakings thus far discussed were carried on si-
multaneously from the start, though with varying distribution of em-
phasis, and accompanying them and increasingly occupying the center of
the stage, particularly in the final year, was the work of research and
writing.

Before the latter is taken up, however, a word may be said about still
another parallel activity—the survey's systematic efforts to reveal some
of the benefits of, and to build up lasting community support for, the
work that it was inaugurating. To this end extensive use was made of
platform, press, periodical, special exhibit, and radio; and the strength-
ening of the historical society, as a medium for the stimulation and
substantial expression of community interest, was a major objective
throughout. The survey prompted and for the most part conducted or
carried out, among other things, a reorganization of the society; the
concentration and systematization of its correspondence and membership
and financial records; continuous and at times intensive campaigns for
new members and increased revenues; the expansion of its library serv-
ces; the editing and remodeling of its magazine; the planning of its
meetings; and the inauguration of the annual historical tour conducted
jointly by the society and the summer session of the university.

Unfortunately, the tangible results in the way of increasing and
broadening the base of community support for the work of the survey and the society were disappointing. The latter was able to raise by special subscription the greater part, but not all, of its relatively small allotted share of the expense of the survey. The society's membership and its regular revenues from private sources were noticeably increased, but not enough to offset increased costs of operation and the loss, during most of the survey period, of an annual subsidy normally received from Allegheny County. But the times were difficult, the full fruit of the enterprise had yet to appear plainly before the public eye, and none can yet say that that fruit does not carry within it the seeds of further sustained efforts in the field of western Pennsylvania history in which the society and the community will increasingly share.

The crowning achievement of the survey, from the viewpoint of a longstanding educational, cultural, and civic need, was of course its production, in manuscript form, of ten volumes of western Pennsylvania history. They treat of various periods or phases of that history selected for portrayal with reference to one or more such considerations as the need for a work on a given subject, the character and completeness of the available materials, the previous training and the aptitudes of the author, and the interests of the prospective reader. Although they fall roughly into the three categories marked out at the beginning, all are based on scholarly study and none is dull reading.

Five of the works were written on the public or popular level, with the interests of the general reader in mind. Most comprehensive of these, a work embodying important contributions from nearly all the members of the survey's research staff, is a history of "The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania" by Dr. Buck, in which, through a symmetrically patterned, closely woven, and substantial fabric of clean-cut exposition, the author portrays, against the backgrounds of natural environment and historical origins, the general course of events and the major aspects of life in the region from the days of the earliest known human inhabitants, through the years of struggle for mastery over the western country, to about 1815, or to the time when white civilization may be said definitely to have taken root and American control had been
firmly established. Two of the others in the same group were written by Dr. Baldwin, in a characteristically individual style. One, entitled "Whiskey Rebels: The Story of a Frontier Uprising" and written with the restraint appropriate to a definitive product of scholarship, deals, of course, with the famous Whiskey Insurrection of 1794 and presents the first comprehensive, objective study and interpretation of this nationally significant episode; and the other, entitled "The Evolution of Pittsburgh" and written in the freer style suitable for an avowedly impressionistic portrayal, unrolls a panorama of the growth of the "Smoky City," mainly as reflected in contemporary newspapers, from a frontier trading post to the metropolitan center of the present day. A fourth work, a collection of travelers' accounts compiled and edited by John W. Harpster under the title "Pen Pictures of Early Western Pennsylvania," affords first-hand glimpses of the region and of the conditions of life in it as viewed through the eyes of the early explorer, missionary, soldier, trader, Indian captive, settler, visitor, or westward-bound emigrant; and for the present-day resident or visitor Dr. Randolph C. Downes compiled a much-needed "Guide Book" to the many points of historical interest in the region. Considered as an aid to research, it may be added parenthetically, the collection of "Pen Pictures" is but a suggestion of what the survey had hoped to do in the way of making important source materials generally available to scholars.

Three of the series were produced on the research level and are frankly monographic in character, but the supposedly dampening effects of footnotes and other technical apparatus are more than offset for the general reader by the qualities of substance and style to be found in Dr. Baldwin's "Keel Boat Age on Western Waters," a history of the river traffic out of Pittsburgh and along the western waters generally in the days before the steamboat; in Dr. Downes's comprehensive account of the process by which the Indian was forced to give way before the advancing tide of white civilization, in a work entitled "Indian Relations in the Upper Ohio Valley"; and in Dr. Russell J. Ferguson's "Early Western Pennsylvania Politics," in which are revealed fully for the first time the occasions, course, and state and national causes and conse-
sequences of the western Pennsylvania frontiersman's political attitudes and activities.

Not the least important are the two remaining works, produced on the public-school level by Dr. J. Ernest Wright, and written in an imaginative, vivid, and human style calculated to appeal to young people but by no means without interest to adults. One, entitled "Rifle and Plow," is a portrayal of stirring events and colorful personalities likely to appeal particularly to youths of junior high-school age; and the other, entitled "Pioneer Life in Western Pennsylvania," is a somewhat mature consideration of frontier living conditions and folkways designed for the instruction of senior high-school students.

These works will doubtless soon speak for themselves, for it is expected that some if not all of them will be published in the near future under arrangements yet to be publicly announced, and it remains here only to mention certain of the more important projects that stemmed from or developed alongside the survey program and in the promotion of which the survey had some hand. In pursuit of a constant aim to develop mutually helpful working relationships with other agencies and individuals with like interests, both within and outside the region, the survey took a leading part in the founding and fostering of the Pennsylvania Historical Association. Its experimental stock-taking of the historical resources of Somerset County paved the way for similar, government-supported surveys that embrace the entire region and that continue, uncompleted, to this day. It was associated in an advisory capacity with the Western Pennsylvania Architectural Survey, a project carried on by Charles M. Stotz and a committee of the Pittsburgh chapter of the American Institute of Architects, with financial assistance from the Buhl Foundation, the results of which have lately been made available by the foundation in a handsomely printed and copiously illustrated volume on the early architecture of the region. Finally, the survey's broadly based accumulations of materials and tools for research in its field pro-

3 For an account of the earlier stages of this development, see Louis W. H. Johnston, "The Government-supported Historical Survey of Pennsylvania in the Western Counties," ante, 18: 209-222 (September, 1935), and for notice of later developments, along this and related lines, 19: 151 (June, 1936).
vided initial advantages in the carrying out of two other major projects, both jointly sponsored by the university and the foundation and each undertaken by a writer of note, one by Arthur Pound, who has written an industrial history of western Pennsylvania, and the other by Dr. E. Douglas Branch, who is writing a history of transportation in the region, to be entitled, "Travelways of Western Pennsylvania."

Is it conceivable that all this fine flowering of written history will not endlessly and increasingly inform, enrich, and uplift the life of the western Pennsylvania community, or that the important part played by that community in the making of America will much longer be obscured? On the other hand can the present harvest fail to be generally recognized, abundant though it be, as potentially but the first of the endless yields of which the field is capable? Certain it is that alert teachers of history and successive increments of student recruits at the university and elsewhere will continue to cultivate this field of research as they have in the past, and it is to be hoped that some agency will make adequate permanent provision for the indispensable, if somewhat unromantic and unspectacular, work of ground-breaking and soil preparation—literally, that of collecting and caring for materials—which absorbed so much of the time and energies of the survey and which the latter necessarily left unfinished. And so far, it would seem, the historical society, with its advantages of newly enlarged equipment, singleness of purpose, and traditionally recognized rights and obligations of leadership, is in the best position, granted adequate community backing, to render that basic service.