Four years ago the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania reached the century mark, not of its own life, but of efforts to establish such an institution in Pittsburgh. At that time the society was too much preoccupied with its responsibilities and opportunities as a sponsor and beneficiary of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey to take more than a backward glance, but now that it is once more on its own and facing an uncertain future, it seems appropriate to recall the society’s antecedents, review its past efforts and achievements, and suggest some of its unrealized possibilities of service to the community.

The story of the society and its predecessors is one of many discouragements but of no little solid accomplishment; of repeated efforts on the part of a few civic leaders, and of tantalizingly spasmodic community interest; of dependence, oftentimes, on the interest and initiative of one person; of meetings held here and there in borrowed quarters; of collections assembled and dispersed; of apologetic references to Pittsburgh’s preoccupation with more practical affairs and lack of interest in the cultural benefits of awareness and knowledge of its significant and colorful past. For eighty-five years after the breaking of ground for the first fort

1 The writer was assisted in the preparation of accounts of the periods 1879–1908 and 1908–30 by preliminary drafts done respectively by John W. Harpster and Frank B. Sessa, members of the staff.
at the Forks of the Ohio, in 1749, no organized effort was made here to recall the history of those times. It took another forty-five years and three abortive attempts, begun successively in 1834, 1843, and 1858, for an historical society to take permanent root; thirty-five years more, and several revivals, for the present society, organized in 1879, to secure a home of its own; another four years before systematic publication was successfully begun; and to this day the society remains practically un-endowed.

On the other hand, with negligible revenues in the earlier years and with an average regular annual income of less than five thousand dollars in the past twenty years, the society has rendered valuable service to the community and has equipped itself in important respects for the continuation and expansion of that service. None can measure the cumulative inspirational and educational benefits of the meetings, anniversary celebrations, site-markings, and other activities of the local society—or societies, but unsustained and infrequent as these activities often were, they have borne certain visible fruits. Chief among these, from the standpoint of the development of the society, are a fairly stable membership, still far too small, to be sure, but broadly representative of all elements in the community; a well-equipped, fireproof building, located in Pittsburgh’s famed Civic Center; a growing library and museum; and twenty volumes of western Pennsylvania history published by the society in the form of articles, documents, and historical news in its quarterly, the Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine. Moreover, the society prepared the way and provided the occasion for the launching of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey, 1931–36, housed the latter’s activities, and in other ways shared in the production of the survey’s ten volumes of regional history now being published by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Now, with greatly enlarged responsibilities but static revenues, the society carries on in the hope that increasingly generous and dependable community support—most effectively to be expressed in the form of endowment—will enable it to maintain the services developed in association with the survey, and to seize some of the newer opportunities for leader-
ship that in these days of quickened historical consciousness almost daily literally thrust themselves upon its attention.

THE SOCIETY OF 1834

By 1834, Pittsburgh, founded seventy-six years before on the smoldering ruins of Fort Duquesne, had become an important manufacturing and trading center, with a population of almost forty thousand, eleven newspapers, and communication east and west by stage, canal boat, and steamboat. The city had become widely known as "The Birmingham of America" but had attained no great fame as a seat of institutions of learning and culture. According to an account in the Pittsburgh Mercury of August 4, 1830, Henry Baldwin of Pittsburgh and Meadville, newly appointed associate justice of the United States Supreme Court, had told a Pittsburgh audience, in substance, that in a new country the emphasis should be placed on developing the material bases of civilization and that "we have not reached that point at which we can find men of leisure, capital and inclination to undertake those works which constitute the pride and the scientific glory of any country which has attained its highest perfection in literature, science and the polished arts."

Yet there were men in Pittsburgh whose interests were not entirely material and it is to some of these that we owe the establishment in 1834 of the earliest known predecessor of the present historical society. What prompted the move can only be conjectured, for contemporary newspaper accounts are the only available source of information. Possibly it was the example of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, organized at Philadelphia ten years before, or of the many state and local historical societies that sprang into being in the eastern, southern, and even middle western states in the early decades of that century. Or it may have been born under the stimulus of such epochal developments as the commencement, that year, of through traffic on the Pennsylvania Canal and Allegheny Portage Railroad and the establishment of the commonwealth's system of free public schools—at a time when organization for political, educational, and philanthropic purposes seems to have been the order of the day.
At any rate in the *Allegheny Democrat* of January 10, 1834, there appeared a notice inviting "such gentlemen as are friendly to the formation of a Historical Society in this city, to attend a meeting to be held at Mr. George Beale’s long room, on Saturday, the 11th inst. at 7 o’clock, P.M." At the head of the list of thirty signers of the call was the name of Walter Forward, former editor, state legislator, and Congressman, who was later to serve successively as secretary of the treasury, chargé d’affaires to Denmark, and president judge of the district court of Allegheny County. Not a few of the others had also made their marks and many of them were young men in their twenties and thirties who were destined to be heard from in later years. There were Samuel Pettigrew, mayor, and William Little, who was to fill that office a few years later; Thomas M. Howe, treasurer of the Board of Trade; Benjamin Bakewell, George W. Jackson, and M. B. Miltenberger, manufacturers; Richard Biddle, Cornelius Darragh, Wilson McCandless, Alfred W. Marks, A. L. Pentland, and Thomas Williams, attorneys; William Addison and William H. Denny, doctors; R. H. Douthitt and John Harper, bank clerks, and John Snyder, cashier; S. P. Church and George Wallace, merchants; W. M. Shinn and Joseph Snowden, druggists; John B. Butler, newspaper man; and James Brown, Jr., James W. Brown, George W. Kelly, Caleb Lee, Thomas Liggett, C. G. Smith, and J. A. Stockton.

The announced meeting was held as scheduled, with Walter Forward in the chair and Wilson McCandless and John Harper serving as secretaries. The expediency of forming an historical society was agreed upon, and M. B. Miltenberger, George W. Jackson, and George Darsie, later a director of the Ohio and Pennsylvania Railroad, were appointed a committee to draft a constitution and call a meeting when they were prepared to report. Said the editor of the *Allegheny Democrat* in commenting upon the move in his issue of the fourteenth: "Its undoubted utility strongly recommends it to the public.—It will have a tendency to excite a laudable and salutary ambition among our young men, and even those of riper age. It may divert many from pursuits of a frivolous, and, it may be said, of a pernicious character. Let every philanthropist encourage the project."
Organization was finally effected when, as reported in the *Daily Pittsburgh Gazette* of March 4, "a large and respectable meeting convened at the Hall of the Young Men's Society, on Thursday evening, 27th of February, 1834." Mr. McCandless was called to the chair, Mr. Harper was appointed secretary, and Mr. Miltenberger presented the report of his committee. "The attempt now making," said the latter, "in the formation of the present institution, is altogether a novel undertaking in this place. The members of the committee are also young and inexperienced. It is therefore with all becoming deference, and proper moderation, they have examined the subject intrusted to them, and with heartfelt pleasure, report favorably." The committee, he continued, in trying to find some basis for a constitution for the new society had secured a copy of the constitution of the historical society at Philadelphia, but had concluded that the objects of the latter, "to collect perfect and unexceptionable matter, out of which collection, to form a history of Pennsylvania," were too lofty and impracticable for the new group to contemplate, and furthermore that one such erudite organization in a state was enough. The committee had therefore drawn up a constitution of its own planning and was prepared to make certain general recommendations. The first was that meetings should be held once a month "in a large room," that the members should be drawn from the educated classes and also from "the respectable although less informed industrious mechanics of our city," and that two lectures on the history of the country should be given at each meeting. In the second place, the establishment of a general library for the use and improvement of the members was strongly recommended. Pittsburgh had "as yet no extensive public library—no Schools of Philosophy—no Hall where the arts and sciences are cultivated," reported the committee. "We appear to the stranger who visits us, to be absorbed in the pursuits of wealth, totally forgetful that 'knowledge is necessary to happiness.'"

The committee's recommendations were embodied in the constitution then proposed and adopted, and the following were elected officers for the ensuing year: president, Benjamin Bakewell; vice president, W. W. Fetterman, Esq.; treasurer, John Harper; secretary, Wilson McCandless; librarian, Charles H. Kay; and council, Richard Biddle, M. B.
Miltenberger, George Darsie, George W. Jackson, Robert S. Simpson, and Thomas Williams.

In addition to provisions more or less common to such documents, the constitution, printed in full in the Pittsburgh Daily Advocate and Advertiser of March 4, stipulated that "this association shall be denominated 'The Historical Society of Pittsburgh'; that its object 'shall be, the advancement of knowledge in ancient and modern history, and particularly with regard to the religious, political, civil and natural history of the U. States—and for the establishment of a Library'; that the council "shall receive donations made to the Society, and transfer the same to the proper officer—procure acquisitions to the Library, &c.'; that "the Society shall meet monthly, on the first Monday of each month"; and that "each member shall pay a monthly tax of 25 cents."

With all this careful preparation it would seem that the new society must have persisted in its purpose for a time, but no further contemporary references to it have been found, and presumably it gradually declined—perhaps overshadowed by other organizations in which a number of its leaders were actively interested.

THE SOCIETY OF THE 1840's

The second society, which first adopted the name "Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania," was organized on October 23, 1843, "at a meeting of several gentlemen of this city, interested in collecting and preserving materials relating to the early settlement of the Western country." A very brief account of the meeting was published in several of the local newspapers, including the Daily Advocate and Advertiser of November 13 following, which is here quoted. The gentlemen referred to were nearly all men whose names are familiar to students of Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania history. William Wilkins, then a Congressman, served as temporary chairman, and Dr. Joseph P. Gazzam, as secretary. The constitution adopted was presented by Rev. Dr. George Upfold, rector of Trinity Church and apparently the prime mover in the revived undertaking. Permanent officers were chosen as follows: president, Harmar Denny, former state legislator and Congressman; vice presidents, Rev. Dr. John Black, Benjamin Bakewell, William Wilkins, and Richard Biddle; treasurer, Dr. William H. Denny; recording secretary, David Ritchie, Esq.; corresponding secretary, Neville B. Craig,
editor of the *Gazette*; curator, Walter H. Lowrie, Esq.; and counsellors, Dr. Upfold, Thomas Bakewell, president of the Board of Trade, Dr. William Addison, John M. Snowden, pioneer editor, Charles Shaler, county judge, and William Eichbaum, manufacturer. It is interesting to note among the vice presidents the names of two, Messrs. Bakewell and Biddle, who had served as officers of the first society.

The same account reports the holding of a second meeting, at the Western University on November 2, where it was resolved that the proceedings of the first gathering be published. Beyond that is silence, so far as newspaper notice of the society's activities is concerned, but in a letter that Dr. Upfold wrote to the corresponding secretary of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania on July 7, 1846, and that was published in volume 4 of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, he took occasion to say: “The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, which, in connection with a few antiquarians of this city, I had a share in instituting some three or four years since, is not dissolved, and I hope in the course of the approaching autumn and winter we may succeed in giving it life and vigor. But we are a working population, with little leisure for literary pursuits of any kind, and I am not very sanguine of success.” The final word appears to have been spoken by Neville Craig, an officer of the society, when he observed in announcing the discontinuance of his monthly, *The Olden Time*, with the issue of December, 1847: “We regret this event, because we have had some pleasant days editing the work, and in collecting and selecting materials for it; and because we believe our scheme ... was the best substitute which could be devised for a spirited and energetic Historical Society. Various attempts to establish such a society had been made before the editor thought of this periodical. These attempts all proved failures, and now the *Olden Time* follows in the rear of its predecessors.” In the meantime, according to a statement of William M. Darlington reported in the *Gazette* of November 27, 1858, “the books, papers and historic records” collected by the society had been destroyed in the great fire of 1845.

**THE SOCIETY OF 1858-60**

Mr. Darlington’s statement was made in the course of his remarks as chairman of the first meeting of the third historical society, again called “The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania,” on November 26,
1858. The day before had been celebrated on a large scale in Pittsburgh as the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the city, and the occasion had served, Mr. Darlington explained, to bring to a head a project that "many of our citizens who take an interest in historic events had for a long time been discussing." The number in attendance at the meeting was not large—seventeen—but nearly all were men prominent in the community. Among those who voiced enthusiastic approval of the undertaking were former Governor William F. Johnston and Henry M. Brackenridge, noted lawyer and author, and among distinguished visitors from outside the city were the former western Pennsylvanians, John A. and Washington A. Roebling.

Fortunately the official minutes of this society have survived, together with fuller accounts of some of the meetings in the newspapers, and a few odds and ends of its correspondence and papers. The first four meetings were devoted to organization. Temporary officers chosen at the outset were: chairman, Mr. Darlington, prominent attorney and bibliophile; vice presidents, Thomas J. Bigham and Robert McKnight, attorneys; secretaries, Daniel L. Eaton, of the editorial staff of the Gazette, and Florus B. Plimpton, Dispatch reporter. At a meeting held on December 6, a constitution was adopted, and on December 27 and January 10 came the nomination and election of the following permanent officers: president, Wilson McCandless, then on the verge of appointment to a federal district judgeship; vice presidents, James Veech, Esq., of Uniontown, Rev. Dr. David H. Junkin of Hollidaysburg, Neville B. Craig, Rev. Dr. William D. Howard, and Henry M. Brackenridge; treasurer, Felix R. Brunot, industrialist and philanthropist; secretary and librarian, Daniel L. Eaton. Mr. Brunot, though a frequent attendant at meetings, could not accept his election, and Robert H. Palmer, a merchant, was later elected in his stead. Judge McCandless, it will be recalled, had served as secretary of the society of 1834, and Mr. Craig, as corresponding secretary of the society of the 1840's.

The constitution, not recorded in the minute book but published in part in the Gazette of December 7, 1858, among other things stated the object of the society to be "the collection and dissemination of information connected with our early history"; provided for the holding of "stated meetings on the second Monday evening of every month"; ar-
ranged for the proposal of new members at one meeting and their election at the next; required all members to sign the constitution; and called for annual dues of three dollars, or a single payment of twenty dollars for life membership.

During the seventeen months of its existence the society held twenty meetings—at which the more regular attendants were Messrs. Eaton, Bigham, Darlington, Palmer, Brunot, James E. Dickson, and Sidney F. Von Bonnhorst—and acquired some thirty new members. The first two meetings were held at the Merchants’ Exchange, the three following in the rooms of the Board of Trade, and the others in the rooms of the Young Men’s Mercantile Library Association. For programs it was the custom to appoint at each meeting the “essayist” for the next, and Messrs. Craig, Veech, Darlington, Bigham, Eaton, and others presented papers on such subjects as Henry Bouquet, the title of Virginia to the “Panhandle,” European exploration of the upper Ohio Valley, and early steamboat-building in Pittsburgh. New emphasis was placed on the collection of materials, and the minutes record the receipt of a number of items, including important original documents, and of a single gift of seventy-three volumes, including thirty-nine volumes of *Niles’ Weekly Register*. Other gifts were said to be forthcoming, notably from Mr. Veech, as soon as the society could provide for their safe-keeping. Publication was also contemplated, and a committee was appointed to arrange a series of lectures, the proceeds of which were “to be applied for a publication fund.”

At the meeting of December 12, 1859, Jacob F. Slagle, an attorney, was appointed to prepare and secure the enactment of articles of incorporation, but the very meeting at which he reported having obtained a charter from the court, that of April 9, 1860, proved to be the last. Evidently meetings had begun to drag; sometimes there were as few as four members in attendance; “essayists” began to absent themselves or ask for more time; and occasionally there was little but routine business, with perhaps some informal discussion. A proposal made toward the end, that meetings be held quarterly instead of monthly, might have saved the day had not the approach of the national election and the subsequent outbreak of the Civil War intervened to absorb the attention of all. What became of the society’s collections is not known, except that at
least two of the more important documents it acquired have since found their way into the files of the present society.

BEGINNINGS OF THE PRESENT SOCIETY, 1879

Nineteen years passed before the fourth, and ultimately successful, attempt was made to effect the permanent establishment of an historical society in Pittsburgh. The movement originated among the "old-timers" of the community, and, consciously or unconsciously, was part of the larger movement, stimulated by the Philadelphia centennial celebration of 1876 and other observances of the seventies, that led to the establishment of about forty historical societies throughout the country in that decade. The resulting association, though at first limited in the character of its membership and purposes, soon developed into an historical society in the full sense of the term.

On April 10, 1879, in response to a call published in the newspapers over the names of William Rinehart, tobacco manufacturer, William M. Gormly, notary public, and John Fullerton, wholesale tobacconist, "a very large and respectable audience of the Citizens of this City and Vicinity of over 50 years residence assembled in the First Methodist Protestant Church, Fifth Avenue near Smithfield Street," that the "Old Folks" might "meet together and revive old associations, and refresh each others memories of the past, and early history of this place." Rev. Dr. James Allison, editor of the Presbyterian Banner, was elected chairman, and Mr. Gormly, secretary; seven "vice presidents" were named—most of whom enjoyed the honor but one week; and a committee on organization was appointed. A week later, on April 17, the "Old Residenters," as they were commonly called, met at the same place and among other things elected the following officers for the ensuing year: president, Thomas J. Bigham; vice presidents, Dr. Allison, Reuben Miller, Jr., industrialist, Judge Wilson McCandless, former mayor William Little, John Harper, bank president, and William M. Darlington; treasurer, Mr. Rinehart; and secretary, Mr. Gormly. Though reports of the proceedings do not recall the fact, four of these men, Messrs. Harper, McCandless, Bigham, and Darlington, had been officers of the society of 1834 or that of 1858–60—and of both in the case of Judge McCandless.

Originally, as suggested by the terms of the first call, membership was
limited to men who had resided in Pittsburgh or other parts of western Pennsylvania for fifty years or more, but women were also admitted on the same conditions upon the adoption of a constitution on May 13, 1880, and on April 13, 1882, membership was thrown open to “persons of any age who take an interest in the object of our organization,” namely, “to perpetuate facts relating to our local history, by securing the legendary and traditional before they pass into the region of mythology.” The latter change had been portended by a reference to the organization in the minutes of its meeting of December 8, 1881, as the “Old Residents Association of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania Historical Society,” and was accompanied by the adoption of the name, “Historical Society of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania.” Two years later the “Pittsburgh” was formally eliminated and the present name adopted.

THE RIVAL SOCIETY OF 1882-85

Possibly the action of the “Old Residenters” in welcoming all comers to the fold was influenced by the organization, about six weeks before, of a “Western Pennsylvania Historical Society” not limited to persons of long residence. On March 6, 1882, eleven men met in the librarian’s room at Library Hall to organize such a society—whether because of dissatisfaction with the policies, or differences with the leaders, of the existing organization can only be conjectured. John D. McKennan, Esq., appears to have been the prime mover, for he called the meeting to order and served as chairman of the committee presently appointed to draft a constitution. But Rev. Dr. S. J. Wilson, of the Western Theological Seminary, was elected chairman, and H. M. Hoyt, Jr., secretary. David S. Wilson in vain recommended that the contemplated organization “should be consolidated with the one already in existence, and that both should be made adjunct of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania,” and letters from John Dalzell, Esq., Isaac Craig, and Rev. William J. Holland, asking that they be enrolled among the organizing members, were presented by Mr. McKennan.

At least three more meetings were held, according to minutes that in recent years have found their way into the archives of the present society. At a meeting on May 2, officers were elected, a constitution was adopted, and an invitation was extended to “those gentlemen of Western Penn-
sylvania who have been appointed by the Governor of the State to take part in the Wm. Penn centenary" to attend the next meeting of the society, "in order that the celebration may be a success." The governing board, at a meeting in Mr. McKennan's office on May 17, made arrangements for a lecture, including the printing of fifteen hundred tickets and the sending of a ticket "to each member of the Historical Socy of Pittsburg & West. Penna."; and at the same time Mr. McKennan was authorized "to wait upon W. W. Speer Esq and ask his cooperation as a member of the bicentennial commission to further the interests of the Socy." The aforesaid lecture, on "Pennsylvania in Ante Revoluntionary Days and her relation to Federal Institutions," by former United States Senator William A. Wallace of Clearfield, was given on June 6 and recorded as having drawn "a very good audience."

The account of the election of permanent officers is not entirely clear or complete, but indications are that Dr. Wilson was elected president; William B. Negley, Malcolm Hay, Esq., and David S. Wilson, vice presidents; John B. Jackson, secretary; and William R. Thompson, banker, treasurer. Among others who took active part in the meetings were Charles G. Milnor and George A. Berry, bankers, Rev. Dr. Sylvester F. Scovel, and Dr. Holland.

The organization meeting was advertised by an attractively printed circular; twenty-six men, representative not only of Pittsburgh but also of some fifteen other cities and towns in all parts of western Pennsylvania, were listed as desirous of becoming members of the society; and presumably some unrecorded meetings were held. But on May 15, 1885, following the death of Dr. Wilson, this rival or "sister society" was consolidated with the older organization, and Messrs. Thompson and Jackson were elected vice presidents of the latter. The majority of the contributing members of the rival society had agreed "that two societies of this character cannot successfully prosper in the same community—united, efficient work in the securing of valuable history of the past, will result in a larger degree of usefulness to the community."

THE GORMLY REGIME, 1879–86

Meanwhile the older society had been holding meetings regularly, and it was to continue thus without break for a little over seven years—a
period coincident with the term of William M. Gormly as secretary. Though but one of the three principal founders of the society, Mr. Gormly it was, apparently, who did most to keep the venture going, and it is from his legible, full minutes and timely memoranda that we gain most of our knowledge of those early years.

For several months after its organization the society met at Union Temperance Headquarters, in a third-floor room of the Allegheny County Christian Alliance, but climbing the stairs proved so difficult for the elderly members that in 1880 the use of the city's common council chamber was secured, and there, with few exceptions, all regular meetings were held until 1888, when the new courthouse was completed.

Once under way, meetings were held monthly, except during the summer, when "the warm weather, short evenings and many absent during the dog-days" interfered, and the "stay-at-homes" had "little inclination to delve after ancient literature." Even in season the meetings occasionally had the weather or rival attractions to contend with, and at best attendance probably averaged about fifteen or twenty persons. Only four braved a snowstorm to attend the meeting of January, 1884, and no meeting was called in January, 1886, because a "Great Blizzard" had made "pedestrianism very difficult." The meeting of September, 1881, was adjourned because the comedian, John Owens, was playing a Pittsburgh engagement and the manager invited the society to attend—as it did, to enjoy more humorous if less historical entertainment. In a less direct but equally effective way, the revivalists Moody and Sankey caused the postponement of the society's annual meeting in April, 1885.

The first meetings were informal in character but for some time were opened with prayer. Personal reminiscences were the order of the day, but formal papers gradually supplanted extemporaneous talks. The burden of preparing and reading most of the papers fell upon about half a dozen members, most of them officers of the society: Thomas J. Bingham, president from 1879 to 1883; Judge John E. Parke, president from 1883 to 1885; James P. Fleming, president in 1885; and Mr. Gormly, the secretary. Thomas J. Chapman, principal of North Public School, Capt. John M. Killen, and Father Andrew A. Lambing, pastor of the church of Our Lady of Mercy until 1885, also contributed a dozen or more papers each, and with these speakers as a nucleus the society was
able to provide a varied program. Some of the papers were published in the newspapers; some are to be found in the published writings of their authors—notably Parke and Chapman; and some in historical magazines of that day—the *Magazine of Western History*, *The Historical Register and Notes and Queries*, and Lambing's *Historical Researches in Western Pennsylvania*.

Among special meetings held by the society was an open-air meeting at Camp Arlington near Castle Shannon on Decoration Day in 1879. At another, a picnic held at President Fleming's farm in September, 1885, the oldsters played "town ball" and kept tally after the old fashion of cutting notches in a stick. The first lady to address the society was Mrs. M. E. Thropp Cone, whose paper, "A Plea for Valley Forge," presented in October, 1883, so moved the members that a special committee was appointed to prepare "a suitable address in behalf of the object (The Monumental Association of Valley Forge)." The outstanding meeting of this early period, however, was the occasion, in December, 1885, when Mrs. Charles Wade, better known as Bessie Bramble, "a chast and versatile writer," addressed the society on "A Reform Needed in History." The more commodious chapel of the First Presbyterian Church had been secured for the event and the former custom of opening meetings with prayer was revived. Mrs. Wade's thesis was that women had not been treated fairly by history, and the secretary cautiously noted: "That the fair reader discussed the subject in an able, dignified manner does not admit of any doubt."

The society began early to receive and make public appeals for gifts of old records and objects, though it had no permanent depository for them and they had to be kept for the most part in the homes or offices of leading members. At first such "relics" were merely exhibited—and enjoyed—at meetings, but beginning with the gifts, in January, 1880, of a copy of a deed from the Indians to George Croghan and a Pittsburgh directory for 1815, books, manuscripts, newspapers, historical objects, and paintings were gradually acquired and an archives committee was appointed to care for them. The most important acquisition—one that was to cause a great deal of trouble twelve years later—was that of nine oil paintings of Pittsburgh and its vicinity presented in January, 1885, through Gen. Alfred L. Pearson. The paintings were the work of
Russell Smith of Philadelphia and had been done from sketches made by him in 1833. The society had reason to be proud of them and for a time they were displayed in the windows of the art dealer, J. J. Gillespie.

Among other interests of the society was the preservation of old landmarks, such as the Bouquet redoubt, the old penitentiary, and the Indian mound at McKees Rocks, though its resolutions on the subject failed to arouse enough interest at the time to protect these vestiges of earlier days. It was interested not only in the past but in contemporary affairs as well. One evidence of this is the copious memoranda supplied by the secretary, Mr. Gormly, in the minute books. In addition to compiling lists of early postmasters and city and county officials, the secretary kept a day-to-day compendium of interesting local events, with frequent notes on the weather and comparisons with that of other years. Included also are several accounts of the Dukes-Nutt trial, a cause célèbre in western Pennsylvania in the early eighties, with a "black list" of the jurors who acquitted the villain of his crime and a "white list" of the jurors of a subsequent trial who acquitted the noble brother who killed the villain. In the minutes proper, along with frequent eulogies and resolutions of sympathy marking losses by death among the aging members, are recorded a resolution of sympathy and encouragement addressed to President Garfield after he was shot in 1881, and voluminous expressions of sorrow after his death. In 1885 the society sent a message of hope to former President Grant, "the greatest Military Captain of the World," during what shortly proved to be his last illness, and elected him a corresponding member.

As death overtook one after another of the leading "Old Residenters"—Mr. Rinehart in 1880, Mr. Bigham in 1884, and Judge Parke and Mr. Fleming in 1885—the need for new blood and a larger membership became increasingly apparent. In 1883 the first concerted drive to secure new members was undertaken; each member was urged to bring one or more friends to the meetings, and the ladies, hitherto barred or overlooked by the founders, were particularly invited. Annual membership, it was announced, was available at only a dollar a year, and life membership for five dollars; affiliation with the group was eventually dignified by the granting of "Lithographic Certificates of Membership"; a special invitation was extended—apparently in vain—to the city and
county school superintendents, with a view of interesting them and their teachers and students in local history; not a few distant friends and celebrities were elected corresponding or honorary members; and in 1884 the society published and widely distributed, in pamphlet form, a *Synopsis* of its proceedings during the first five years. The resulting gains can only be suggested, for the “Roll of Members” is inconsistent with the minutes and is obviously incomplete. Suffice it to say that twenty-five were elected life members in the last three months of 1883, followed by an equal number of elections to the same class in the last four months of 1884; and that entries in the roll book in the handwriting of Mr. Gormly show a total for the period of 121 dues-paying members.

But with Mr. Gormly’s death in the summer of 1886 the society fell into a decline for a short period. It met but twice that fall, mainly to memorialize the faithful secretary and elect his successor, W. Gibson Miller. Apparently the driving force of the organization was gone, for no further meetings were recorded for a little over a year. At that time Felix R. Brunot was president, and John Fullerton—successor to Mr. Rinehart in the office and destined to fill it until 1893—was treasurer.

**UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF FATHER LAMBING**

From the earliest years of the society, Father Lambing, by this time entered upon his long pastorate at St. James Roman Catholic Church in Wilkinsburg, had been an active member and frequent speaker at its meetings. A distinguished local historian, he had helped found the Ohio Valley Catholic Historical Society at Pittsburgh in 1884 and was editor of a publication that became the *Catholic Historical Review*. As secretary of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania from 1888 to 1892, during the presidency of Judge Charles S. Fetterman, and as its president from 1892 until after 1900, he gradually took Mr. Gormly’s place as mainstay of the organization. At first, however, his varied interests prevented him from devoting much of his time to the society and it struggled weakly through the late eighties and early nineties. Even the incorporation of the society in September, 1888, and the removal of its effects to rooms in the newly finished courthouse the following month failed to enliven the organization. Between October, 1889, and October, 1891, only one meeting was recorded in the minute book, and in the lat-
ter year the society was virtually reorganized. Meetings in the courthouse had to be held in the afternoons, because the building was not open evenings, and the small attendance there at those hours led the society in 1891 to transfer its activities and possessions to the Carnegie Free Library of Allegheny, where its meetings were then regularly held, in the lecture hall, until 1896. An innovation in the programs, undertaken at about the same time, was the inclusion of “musical and elocutionary performances” at each meeting. This change met with such favor that the practice was continued for about five years—except, as on one occasion, when the key to the piano could not be found.

The programs were coming to be more and more systematically arranged in advance, and the responsibility for them during this period rested with a “Committee on Papers,” headed successively by President Fetterman, Leonard H. Eaton, principal of the Forbes School, and Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, Father Lambing’s successor at the church of Our Lady of Mercy. The committee began to function most effectively under Mr. Eaton, and after his death in 1895, his daughter, Marie G. Eaton, became for a time its guiding spirit. The latter had been employed as a “canvasser” for the society in 1893, but although she did good work in securing new members and enlarging the society’s collections, her inability to work harmoniously with Father Lambing—or vice versa, as the case may be—made it impossible, eventually, for her to continue in any capacity. Her employment as a solicitor would seem to indicate that the society was in a healthier financial condition in 1893 than for several years before. In 1889 there had been talk of raising the life membership fee from five to ten dollars, and when, late in 1892, the society found itself running into debt, it was decided to levy an assessment of one dollar upon every member, although it was uncertain that the debt could be paid in this way because none knew exactly how many members there were. At this critical juncture, David Robinson, a banker-member, offered a hundred dollars, and Father Sheedy contributed twenty-five—whereupon “the society seemed to awaken as from a dream,” recorded the secretary. It was upon the weathering of this crisis that the board decided to employ Miss Eaton and at the same time raised the “salary” of the secretary, Miss Jennie Lambing, from two to five dollars per month.

As secretary, Father Lambing had been authorized to employ his
niece as an assistant, and when he became president in 1892, Miss Lambing succeeded him in the former office, to be replaced in turn by William T. Lyon, a bank teller, in 1894. Miss Lambing is credited in the minutes of 1892 with being the first lady member of the society to deliver an address before the group; her subject was "The American Turkey," and the minutes record that "the youthful reader was highly complimented." The next year two ladies, Miss Julia Morgan Harding and Miss Kate C. McKnight appeared on the same program, and in 1896 the society was indebted to Miss Eaton for three papers presented during the year.

Among other local speakers at the meetings during this period were Daniel Agnew, Samuel Harden Church, Isaac Craig, Boyd Crumrine, Edgar W. Hassler, Col. William A. Herron, Dr. William J. Holland, and Stephen Quinon, editor of the Pittsburgh Daily News. Others, including Dr. Francis H. Wade, Col. James W. Drape, Dr. George A. Keyser, Rev. M. D. Lichliter, Rev. James Allison, and Dr. John Morrison, each contributed several papers—though on one occasion Dr. Keyser started to read a paper on "The Strong Points of Shakespeare" and for obvious reasons "was not permitted to finish it." Thomas Harper presented eight papers and Father Lambing, from the date of his first association with the group, read about three dozen, none of them repetitious.

The society of the nineties did more, however, than listen to historical papers. Several site-marking projects were proposed or endorsed, including another effort to get action in the matter of preserving the Bouquet redoubt, or the blockhouse, as it has been more commonly called; in 1892 the society took the initiative in arranging and conducting a community celebration of the incorporation of Pittsburgh as a borough, at a great meeting held at the old city hall on the Monday following the actual anniversary day, April 22; and it issued a number of publications in pamphlet form, beginning with a full account of the celebration just mentioned, and continuing with a 16-page Souvenir Christmas Book in 1894, its Charter and By-Laws in 1896, and a 37-page Report, including papers by Father Lambing and Mr. Quinon, in 1899.

Among the changes effected under the new by-laws was the raising of annual dues from one to two dollars and of the life membership fee from five to fifteen dollars. At the same time the positions of librarian and
curator were created and Miss Lambing and Mr. Harper, respectively, were chosen to fill them.

Books, newspapers, manuscripts, and "relics" had been steadily accumulating through the years and there was need both for custodians and for a safe depository. The latter was secured for a time when in 1896 the society moved into quarters in the newly completed Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in the Oakland district. It was a move that the society had been planning for years. In 1881, when Andrew Carnegie first suggested a gift of a quarter of a million dollars to the city for a library, the society sent a resolution to him endorsing the project and at the same time asked if it might have an alcove in the proposed building. Mr. Carnegie replied with thanks but made no mention of quarters for the organization. Nevertheless the society actively worked for acceptance of the offer—long delayed by the problem of arranging for the proposed library’s maintenance—and in 1886 Mr. Carnegie wrote the secretary that the society might depend on his co-operation. Moreover, early in 1893 he sent a subscription of a hundred dollars, together with thirty dollars for life memberships for himself and Mrs. Carnegie, and expressed the "hope" that the society would have its permanent home in the new building at Schenley Park. Although the society is reported to have received promises from the library building committee in 1895 that rooms would be assigned to it, the final plan contained no such provision, and Miss Eaton made the society’s plight known through the newspapers. Mr. Carnegie’s letter of 1893 was produced and a compromise was reached whereby the society was to occupy space in a part of the building previously assigned to the Pittsburgh Academy of Science and Art. At the March, 1896, meeting the curator was instructed to remove the society’s effects to the new quarters, and it began holding its meetings there the following month.

One incident that occurred soon after the removal to Carnegie Library is worth recounting. In 1897 a Pittsburgh junk dealer offered to the society nine oil paintings of the region for the sum of five thousand dollars. It was soon discovered that these were the identical pictures by Russell Smith presented to the society in 1885. Because its previous quarters in Allegheny were too small to accommodate many of the society’s possessions, most of them had been kept by members and these
pictures had been stored by Mr. Gormly in an office he shared with C. Hanson Love, also a member of the society. After Mr. Gormly's death the pictures remained in Mr. Love's office until the latter's death eleven years later, when they were sold at auction along with Mr. Love's personal effects. The aforesaid junk dealer claimed he bought the bundle for a dollar and a half—though it was charged that he picked it up along with certain actual purchases—and when he discovered his prize he offered the pictures for sale at preposterous prices. The society instituted suit to regain its property, but to no purpose, and the ultimate disposition of the paintings remains unknown. At least they are not now in the possession of the society.

A MINUTELESS INTERIM, 1899–1908

From May, 1899, to March, 1908, no minutes were kept, or at least preserved, but although this is one of several indications of a period of marked decline it is a mistake to assume that the society became totally inactive. The break in the record may be accounted for in part by the fact that Edgar W. Hassler, the city clerk, author of Old Westmoreland, and secretary of the society for a number of years before his death in 1905, left no minutes. On the other hand Mr. Lyon, who both preceded and succeeded Mr. Hassler as secretary, had faithfully recorded the meetings up to May, 1899.

A surviving handful of correspondence and papers and the recollections of Omar S. Decker, one of the faithful during that period and ever since, indicate that meetings were kept up with some regularity; that among the more regular attendants were J. Charles Dicken, Esq., Jacob G. Reel, Esq., Edward E. Eggers, librarian of the Carnegie Free Library of Allegheny, and Messrs. Decker, Hassler, and Lyon; that for the convenience of the "regulars" meetings were sometimes held at such places as the city hall, the Second Presbyterian Church, and Mr. Eggers' office; and that Father Lambing continued as president until 1902 at least.

In that year the society, small in numbers though it apparently was, made every preparation for the launching of an 80-page historical magazine devoted to the history of the Upper Ohio Valley. Particularly active in its planning were Messrs. Decker, Lyon, Hassler, and William
G. Irwin, one of the editors of the *Ohio Valley Manufacturer*, and Mr. Hassler suggested that the projected publication be called the "Historical Magazine of Western Pennsylvania" or the "Fort Pitt Magazine." Circulars were printed, two-dollar annual subscriptions received, articles promised or offered, advertisements solicited, bids procured, and exchanges offered by other historical societies. The lawyer-historian, Boyd Crumrine, was offered the editorship, but he felt unable to accept the responsibility. Apparently the difficulty of securing an editor, the cost, and the lack of enough subscriptions prevented the actual launching of the magazine, and it was not until sixteen years later that a similar effort succeeded.

THE REVIVAL OF 1909

When the corporal's guard that carried on during those eight years next emerges in the minute books it is discovered assembled, five strong, at the Allegheny library on March 10, 1908. Among the five were two apparent newcomers, including John E. Potter, who is now serving his twenty-third year as treasurer of the society. The chief business transacted at this and the one other meeting held that year was the election of officers and action with respect to the disposition of the books and papers of the society stored at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. Thomas L. Rodgers, then a member of the county board of assessors, was elected president, apparently for the first time; Mr. Dicken, vice president; Mr. Decker, second vice president; Mr. Eggers, secretary; and Mr. Lyon, the former secretary, treasurer. In the matter of the society's books and papers at the Carnegie Library it was discovered that, during the time when the society's meetings were being held elsewhere and its effects presumably not being regularly attended to, the latter had been absorbed by the library, though it should be added that certain records of obvious concern to the society have since been returned to it.

Such was the situation when, at a meeting held in Mr. Eggers' office on March 9, 1909, the surviving band made a move destined to set the society definitely on the road to solid accomplishment and a home of its own. Among the eight present, as "an invited guest," was Burd S. Patterson, the originator and chief promoter of the great celebration held the year before in commemoration of the sesquicentennial of the founding
of Pittsburgh. Mr. Decker and others had succeeded in arousing Mr. Patterson's interest and he was promptly elected a member and placed on a membership committee then appointed to do something about the parlous condition of the society.

Prompt action resulted. A general call was issued, by circular and press notice, for a meeting to be held in the rooms of the Chamber of Commerce in the Keenan Building, on April 13, for the purpose of reorganizing the society. About fifty persons responded. As it was the regular time for the election of officers this matter was first disposed of by the re-election of most of the existing officers, but with the significant substitution of Mr. Patterson as secretary. Among the nine prominent men who then addressed the gathering was Dr. Samuel B. McCormick, chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh. He described the work being done by the university in the field of history and expressed the hope that the society and the university might co-operate in assembling data on western Pennsylvania history, adding that such co-operation would be better served were the society soon to obtain a building of its own as "one of the Oakland group." Another of the speakers was William H. Stevenson, wholesale grocer and civic leader, who was to succeed Mr. Rodgers as president of the society upon the latter's death two years later, and who with the able assistance of Mr. Patterson was to exercise a leadership that before long made the names of these two men almost synonymous with that of the society. In fact, in later years the society once received a communication significantly if somewhat derisively addressed to the "Stevenson and Patterson Historical Society."

Reorganization was completed at a meeting in May, and in the meantime the membership grew apace: the April meeting had produced forty-three new members, and two weeks later the Pittsburgh Dispatch reported the enrollment of forty more and a total membership of about one hundred and fifty.

With this auspicious start the society embarked on a vigorous program of popular education with a series of projects a mere list of which is impressive. In 1909 and 1910 a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. McCormick prepared a list of some fifty topics in local history and persuaded not a few prominent men and women to agree to give talks on
some of these subjects in the public schools. At the same time the society inaugurated the custom of conducting one-day pilgrimages by rail to places of historical interest, beginning with trips to Ligonier and Bushy Run in 1909, and continuing with one to old Hannastown in 1910. In the latter year it celebrated the 156th anniversary of the “first attempt to fortify the Ohio” at a banquet held at the Monongahela House, and the following year took a leading part in the memorable celebration of the commencement of steam navigation of the western waters, when, as the major feature of a varied and spectacular program, a replica of the first steamboat, the “New Orleans,” was constructed here and piloted down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers in the wake of its prototype. Again, in 1913 the society took the lead in celebrating Allegheny County’s 125th anniversary, and in 1916 sponsored a similar celebration of Pittsburgh’s incorporation as a city.

STEPS TOWARD PERMANENT ESTABLISHMENT

In a period of a little over twenty years the society built up a membership with an annual average of between six and seven hundred; erected and later enlarged a building of its own; launched this magazine, now entering its twenty-first year; extended its organization, at the suggestion and with the substantial aid of Miss Helen C. Frick, by the establishment of its Westmoreland-Fayette branch, now about to celebrate its tenth anniversary; and furnished the occasion for the launching of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey, whose activities in the years 1931 to 1936, and the society’s part in them, were fully reviewed in the December, 1936, number of this magazine.

So important to this whole development was the acquisition of a building that a word or two more about the attainment of this long-cherished object should be added. The need for it, if not self-evident, will be apparent to all who have read the foregoing portrayal of the organization and its predecessors “flitting about from place to place,” as Father Lambing once expressed it, but not until Mr. Patterson and Mr. Stevenson took hold in 1909 was anything done about it. It then took but three years to achieve the first success in this direction. A state appropriation of twenty-five thousand dollars, approved by Governor John K. Tener, a member
of the society, in 1911, together with a previous gift of ten thousand dollars from the unexpended balance of funds raised for the city's sesquicentennial celebration in 1908, enabled the society to acquire a site and erect the first unit of its present building. Great occasions were naturally made of the laying of the cornerstone on October 30, 1912, and of the opening of the building on February 17, 1914, but even then the latter was regarded as but a part of the considerably larger structure that would eventually be needed. In the following years, with such need becoming more and more apparent, repeated efforts to secure an addition were made under the leadership of Mr. Stevenson assisted by Mr. Patterson until the latter's death in 1924. Success came in 1929 when the state assembly, with the approval of Governor John S. Fisher, voted an appropriation of forty thousand dollars for the completion of the society's building, on condition that the society secure a like sum from other sources. The condition was readily met with the aid of funds received from the Buhl Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, Andrew W. Mellon, and over a hundred other individual donors; and ground was broken for the addition the following year.

The enlarged building—occupied in the fall of 1931 and formally rededicated on October 6—is a substantial, commodious, and fireproof structure that has thus far served the society's purposes well. On the first floor are a large pillared foyer or entrance hall, used in part for exhibition purposes; an auditorium comfortably seating upwards of two hundred persons; and two long, well-lighted exhibition halls. The second floor, supplemented on two sides by long third-floor rooms, provides space for offices and for reading, work, and stack rooms, and includes a spacious hall, with skylight, designed for exhibition purposes but adaptable to other uses. The basement provides ample storage facilities besides space readily adaptable to exhibition purposes. Unfortunately Mr. Stevenson did not live to see this fulfillment of his and others' dreams, or the accompanying launching of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey, for he died in 1930, but the auditorium in the new addition was at once formally named Stevenson Hall in his honor.

No longer need the society hold its meetings or its secretary maintain an office in borrowed quarters as they did during the years 1909 to 1914,
the former in the rooms of the Chamber of Commerce and the latter in space provided in the same building through the courtesy of Col. Thomas J. Keenan. But the acquisition of a building brought new responsibilities as well as opportunities. If the fullest use was to be made of it, one or more persons must be kept regularly on duty there, if only to receive and care for the gifts and loans of historical materials and objects that provision of a safe depository at once began to attract, and to make available to visitors the resulting library and exhibits. For a year or two after the opening of the original building in 1914, Mr. Patterson performed these functions, but beginning about 1915 he was relieved of some of them by the employment of Miss Emma D. Poole as an office secretary. The latter was eventually placed in sole charge with the title of librarian and continued so until shortly after the establishment of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey in 1931. Miss Poole was then appointed custodian of the museum, continuing in that capacity until her death in 1936, and for the greater part of the five-year survey period all other activities of the society, as well as the special work of the survey, were conducted under the guidance of Dr. Solon J. Buck, now director of publications in the National Archives, with the aid of a sizeable staff of trained assistants. A few of the latter—the present staff—were then retained, mostly on a part-time basis, in an effort to hold something of the advances made in association with the survey.

In the meantime Robert M. Ewing, Mr. Patterson's successor as secretary, succeeded Mr. Stevenson as president of the society and chairman of the survey board of control in 1930, but in 1935 he relinquished these offices on account of ill health and was succeeded by the present president, former Governor Fisher, to whose place among the trustees Major Ewing was thereupon elected. The latter's successor as secretary was Gregg L. Neel, who served thus until his election as a vice president in 1935, and as acting secretary thereafter until the election, late in the same year, of the present secretary, Dr. Cortlandt W. W. Elkin. Mr. Neel has in recent years headed special committees that have successfully met certain immediate financial needs, and longer-range preparations to meet such needs in future have been placed in the hands of an endowment committee headed by Henry O. Evans, Esq., one of the trustees. Among officers
and trustees whose active interest and services in recent years have not already been suggested, but who have also contributed continuously of their time or money, or both, to the conduct and support of the society's work, mention should be made of Thomas S. Brown, Albert A. Horne, Gen. Albert J. Logan, and Benjamin Thaw, all now gone; of Judge Ambrose B. Reid, one of the present vice presidents, who has served continuously as such, or as a trustee, for seventeen years; and of Frank L. Duggan, Capt. James A. Henderson, Thomas Mellon II, Dr. John W. Oliver, and Mrs. William Reed Thompson, present trustees of from five to twelve years' service.

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

The longest established contribution of the society to the cultural advancement of the community is its holding of meetings to which the public is invariably invited. Such meetings have now been held monthly in season without marked break for over a quarter of a century. The custom now is to hold eight meetings from October to May, including a luncheon meeting held downtown in the fall or early winter, a midwinter "open house" to representatives of other organizations of like interests, and a "University of Pittsburgh Night" in May, when the program is furnished by representatives, usually graduate students, of the history department of that neighboring institution. At each regular meeting papers are read by persons who have made special studies of various aspects of western Pennsylvania history, and to the discussion that often follows President Fisher, from his wide knowledge of Pennsylvania and its history, almost invariably contributes stimulating and informing comment. If nothing more, this type of program provides occasions and common grounds for bringing together people of diversified politics, religion, professional interests, business preoccupations, and social status, thus contributing in some measure to the building up of a wholesome community spirit.

Beginning with the opening of the first unit of its building in 1914, the society has maintained a growing library and a museum, both of which have always been open to the public at regular hours—latterly, for some years, every week day from nine to five, except Saturday afternoons and holidays. Its collections were reorganized and greatly ex-
panded and important bibliographical tools were provided in the days of the survey, following the enlargement of the society’s building, and important additions continue to be received. Available to every reader or student of western Pennsylvania history or allied subjects, whether he or she be a member of the society or not, are: a library of over five thousand books, pamphlets, and periodicals; a newspaper collection of some three hundred bound volumes of Pittsburgh and other newspapers dating from the eighteenth century, and extensive unbound files, notably of foreign-language newspapers published in the interests of groups of the “newer Americans” largely represented in this region; a collection of many thousands of manuscripts, for the most part originals, but including photostatic and microfilm copies and carefully collated transcripts; and varied museum exhibits, interesting to young and old, of portraits, old Pittsburgh scenes, vehicles, implements, furniture, weapons, costumes, personal effects, and other aids to a visualization of the ways of life here in the earlier days. From the standpoint of research the manuscript collection is particularly valuable, including as it does important groups of the personal papers of leading western Pennsylvanians; minutes, reports, correspondence, and other papers of organizations and institutions; unpublished historical articles and other secondary materials in manuscript; and descriptive lists of materials of western Pennsylvania interest in other depositories.

Not the least of the society’s public services is the supplying of information in response to a steady stream of inquiries received by mail and telephone on all manner of subjects, from all manner of individuals and institutions in Pittsburgh and elsewhere. When the desired data is not at hand or the quest for it involves an unwarranted amount of research, as is often the case with obscure details of family history, an effort is always made to direct the inquirer to likelier sources or methods of procedure.

For twenty years past, as noted before, the society has been publishing this quarterly magazine, which is distributed free to its members and which reaches a wide circle of readers and institutions at home and abroad. Launched in 1918, under the direction of an editorial board than and since headed by Omar S. Decker, one of the promoters of the earlier,
abortive attempt, the magazine has been edited by the late Charles W. Dahlinger, Esq., assisted by John P. Cowan as associate editor, until early in 1923, and thereafter, successively, by Dr. Alfred P. James, Dr. John J. Geise, William J. Martin—all members of the history department of the University of Pittsburgh, Dr. Buck, and the present incumbent assisted by Elisabeth Mellon Sellers. It has always been the aim to include in each issue authoritative but none the less interesting articles on various aspects of western Pennsylvania history. Oftentimes significant documents, or selections from them, are included, and reviews of newly published books relating wholly or incidentally to the home province are now a customary feature. Other sections normally included present information about the current work of the society and news of other activities and developments that are of consequence historically to the region. Through its periodic appearance and its growing accumulation of reading, source, and reference materials, the publication cannot fail to have accomplished something of its purpose of stimulating and informing the interest of the community in its own backgrounds and of securing adequate recognition of the role played by the community in the history of the commonwealth and the nation.

In mid-July for the past six years the society has locked up its books, papers, and “relics” and taken to the open road, in association with the summer session and the extension division of the University of Pittsburgh, for the purpose of recalling some of the outstanding events of the early history of the region amidst the scenes where they took place. In these two-day pilgrimages by motor through parts of western Pennsylvania and the adjoining states, historic sites and remains are sought out and luncheon and program meetings are held at the principal cities and towns visited along the way. Moreover the society’s interest in sites nearer home is now being expressed in the form of a systematic, vigorous, and promising movement, conducted under the leadership of Frank C. Harper, to secure the creation of a national park at the historic “Point,” where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to form the Ohio.

In all this and in its lesser undertakings the society aims at mutually helpful co-operation with other agencies working toward the same general ends. It is liberal in granting the use of its auditorium for history
conferences, meetings of patriotic societies, and similar gatherings held under outside auspices; it provides working quarters or facilities for a number of government-supported historical projects—to an extent, indeed, that has suggested for it the pun-sobriquet "Historical Society of WPA"; it co-operates in various ways with institutions actively, if not as exclusively, interested in the collection of local historical material, notably the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and the library of the University of Pittsburgh; and it aims to share in and profit by the activities of historical agencies of broader scope, such as the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies, the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, the Pennsylvania Historical Association, and the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology. For examples, Mr. Stevenson served at different times as treasurer, chairman, and member of the commission, and as a vice president and president of the federation; Major Ewing succeeded him as a member of the commission and then served as a vice president of the federation; Rev. M. D. Lichliter and Messrs. Patterson and Potter each served successively as a vice president and president of the federation; and for several years President Fisher has been a vice president of the archaeological society.

THE PRESENT OUTLOOK

Unfortunately the cost of these services, to say nothing of obviously desirable improvements and extensions, particularly in the development and care of the library, newspaper, and manuscript collections, has outstripped the society's resources. It is true that some degree of financial stability was achieved in the early years of the society's latest rejuvenation, through the building up and holding of a dues-paying membership and through the acquisition of annual subsidies from Allegheny County and the city of Pittsburgh. Beginning with an appropriation of five hundred dollars in 1915–16, the county has normally contributed a thousand dollars a year to the support of the society's work. In 1917–18 the city also began to contribute, through the influence of Robert Garland, who has been a member of city council and an officer of the society for many years, and for some fifteen years the city has regularly made an annual contribution of two thousand dollars. The raising of the annual membership
fee to two and a half, then to three dollars, in 1920 and 1921, and the establishment in 1931 of special classes of membership for those willing to contribute more than the minimum required served further to increase the society's regular income—as the recent further raising of the annual dues to five dollars is expected to do. But the more substantial of these gains were made before the size of the society's building was trebled and its collections and activities were greatly expanded in the days of the survey, with the result that now, in order merely to mark time, as it were, on the higher level it has reached, the society has to make a general appeal each year for help in balancing its modest budget.

In the past, large private contributions have been readily enough secured for spectacular undertakings like the steamboat anniversary celebration of 1911, for tangible things like the building and its equipment, for special projects promising definite products like those of the survey, and for the temporary tiding over of obvious emergencies, but it remains for more leaders in the community to see and respond to the need for more adequate and permanent support of those day-by-day, undramatic labors that must be carried on unremittingly, for the most part behind the scenes and by others than volunteers or mere caretakers, if the better publicized efforts are to continue to be fruitful. It is a fact hard to explain, that in all the sixty-odd years of the present society's existence, no one, with the exception of Mr. Stevenson, who left a bequest of a thousand dollars, has thought to contribute substantially and specifically to a permanent fund in support of the society's basic activities.

On the score of local pride alone, every Pittsburgher or other western Pennsylvanian may well bear in mind two points: one, that this society may fairly be said to symbolize and will continue to symbolize what the community as a whole thinks of its past; and second, that fitting sustainment of the society in this inescapable rôle is the duty of none in the first instance, but the opportunity of all, for the society is in effect a public institution, its government is democratic, and everyone interested is welcomed to its membership and to active participation in its affairs.