John S. Fisher
1867–1940
IN MEMORIAM

Between the close of its 1939-1940 season in May and the opening of the current season in October, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania lost five of its officers and trustees by death. At the meeting of October 29, 1940, resolutions honoring the memory of the late president, former Governor John S. Fisher, and of Captain James A. Henderson, a trustee, were presented and adopted, and committees were appointed to prepare similar resolutions in memory of the late Robert M. Ewing, a trustee and former president of the society, and of George E. Alter and Marcus Rauh, trustees. The substance of these resolutions is here presented together with the names of their authors, the spokesmen of the several committees.

JOHN S. FISHER

On June 25, 1940, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania suffered the untimely loss of its distinguished president, the Honorable John S. Fisher. Lawyer, statesman, business man, and one-time governor of Pennsylvania, Mr. Fisher was born on May 25, 1867, in South Mahoning Township, Indiana County, Pennsylvania. After graduating from the Indiana State Normal in 1886, he taught a few terms in the public schools of Indiana County. He then turned to the study of law and, admitted to the bar in 1893, took up the formal practice of his profession. He soon became known as one of the brilliant young attorneys of western Pennsylvania.
Early in his career he became interested in politics and statecraft. Elected to the Pennsylvania legislature in 1901, he rose rapidly in the esteem of his fellow members. He became chairman of the state capitol investigating commission; state commissioner of banking; a member of the commission on constitutional amendments; a delegate to the Republican national convention in Chicago in 1916; and delegate-at-large to the national convention in Kansas City in 1928, and to the Cleveland convention in 1936.

In 1926 he was elected governor of Pennsylvania and served from January, 1927, until January, 1931. Among the many notable features of his four years of administration, the one that endears him forever to the friends of this society was the enthusiastic support he gave to the bill appropriating forty thousand dollars for the completion of this beautiful building — the home of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Shortly after retiring as governor, he was offered the chairmanship of the board of the National Union Fire Insurance Company of this city, and moved to Pittsburgh. He at once became active in the civic, cultural, and philanthropic movements of this city. He served as president of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, as a director of the Community Fund, and in responsible positions in other organizations. The members of this society soon "drafted" him into service and elected him president in 1935, a position that he filled with honor and distinction until broken health caused him to give up his active duties a few months before his death. During his five years as president of this organization, he gave willingly of his time, his means, and his energy. It is a generally known fact that during these last years of his life he received more joy and more genuine delight in serving the cause of history — studying, teaching, and spreading abroad the knowledge of the history of western Pennsylvania — than he received from any other of the many services that he rendered. The meetings over which he presided were always made richer because of his many sparkling comments — comments that were drawn from a rich storehouse of information that few possess as did Governor Fisher. His presence on our annual historical tours was a source of inspiration to all visitors and local people alike. When he represented this society, as he so often did, at anniversary events, historical
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Robert M. Ewing
1868–1940
markings, and patriotic celebrations, his very presence assured their success.

In the death of John S. Fisher, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania has lost a valuable friend, a wise councillor, and a generous patron. Fitting, indeed, was it that the last years of his life should be devoted so largely to the presidency of this organization.

ROBERT M. EWING

Robert Merton Ewing, a former secretary and president of this Society, died on October 27, 1940. He was born on January 31, 1868, on a farm in Bell Township near Saltsburg, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. He was a son of James H. Ewing and Eleanor J. (Rhea) Ewing. His ancestors were early western Pennsylvania settlers of Revolutionary War stock. His great-great-grandfather, William Findley, was a member of Congress for twenty years and the author of a book on the Whiskey Insurrection of 1794 entitled, History of the Insurrection in the Four Western Counties of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1796).

Major Ewing attended the grade and high schools in Saltsburg, Saltsburg Academy, and Washington and Jefferson College. He taught school for a number of years, for a short period in the Kiskiminetas Springs School, familiarly known as "Kiski," at Saltsburg. He studied law in Indiana County, Pennsylvania, and among his fellow students were John S. Fisher, afterwards governor of Pennsylvania, and Harry White, later a state senator, congressman, and common pleas court judge of Indiana County.

Major Ewing was admitted to the bar of the court of common pleas of Indiana County in 1892 and to the bar of Allegheny County on June 17, 1893. He practiced law in Allegheny County continuously until the time of his death, except for the periods when he was engaged in governmental service.

Major Ewing served as assistant city solicitor of Pittsburgh during the administration of Mayor William A. Magee. On June 23, 1925, Governor Gifford Pinchot appointed him judge of the county court of Allegheny County, in which office he served until the first Monday of Janu-
ary, 1926. His services as judge were eminently satisfactory to the bar and the public. He failed of election because the dominant political leaders saw fit to give this judgeship to another. In the administration of Governor Fisher he served as a deputy attorney general of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Major Ewing served many years in the Pennsylvania National Guard, in which he attained the rank of "Major," by which title he was generally known. He was a veteran of the World War, in which he served as an officer in the finance and quartermaster departments. He was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution; past commander of American Legion Post No. 5; past president and trustee of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania; a member of Voiture Locale No. 5, La Societe des 40 Hommes et 8 Chevaux, a military order of the World War; a member of Orient Lodge No. 580, F. and A. M.; and a member of the Allegheny County and Pennsylvania bar associations. He was a member and ruling elder of the Waverly Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, and a member of the board of trustees of the Presbyterian of Pittsburgh. He took a public-spirited part in many civic and political movements.

Major Ewing was married to Anna S. Davis and after her death to Eleanor Chalfant McCrea, who survives him, as do also two daughters, Mrs. J. A. Jacob of Wellsburg, West Virginia, and Mrs. Robert E. King of Houston, Texas; two sons, Robert Ewing of Huntington, New York, and William Ewing of Pittsburgh; four grandchildren, James Arch Jacob, Jacqueline Anna Jacob, Douglas Rhea Ewing, and Liberty King; two brothers, Dr. Joseph L. Ewing of Rahway, New Jersey, and William C. Ewing of Saltsburg, Pennsylvania; and a sister, Martha Elizabeth Ewing of New Kensington, Pennsylvania.

Robert M. Ewing, Esquire, was a highly esteemed lawyer, respected by the bench and bar of Allegheny County. As a practicing lawyer and judge, he promoted peace and good order in society by counselling and administering equal justice under law to all parties concerned in any case entrusted to him. He had that passion for justice which is righteousness, which alone enables a lawyer to represent his clients faithfully, yet do no injustice to others.
He had that fine ethical professional sensibility which enabled him faithfully to fulfill the oath of office administered to every attorney on admission to the bar, in which he is sworn that he will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the Commonwealth; that he will behave himself in the office of attorney according to the best of his learning and ability, and with all good fidelity, as well to the court as to his clients; and that he will use no falsehood nor delay any person's cause for lucre or malice.

Major Ewing was a patriotic American citizen — patriotic as a soldier and patriotic as a civilian. He was a devoted husband and father, a conscientious churchman, a kind-hearted and generous friend, and a Christian gentleman.

We sorrow at his death but rejoice in his splendid life.

JAMES H. GRAY

JAMES A. HENDERSON

Death has claimed Captain James A. Henderson, one of the most esteemed members of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, who passed away at the Allegheny General Hospital on July 3, 1940, at the age of eighty-nine years.

Captain Henderson had been a member of the society for some thirty years; in 1911 he was in command of the replica of the pioneer steamboat, "New Orleans," which under city and historical society auspices voyaged from Pittsburgh to New Orleans in celebration of the centennial of the beginning of steam navigation on the western waters; he served as a director of this society from 1926 to 1931, and as one of its most active trustees from 1931 almost to the date of his death. It is fitting that the society, to whose interests he gave such faithful and intelligent service, should in this modest way appropriately mark his passing.

His was a life that was successful in the best sense of the word. No man labored more constantly and faithfully for the welfare and uplift of his fellow citizens than he, and when he answered the final call to cease from his labors no one had better fulfilled life's duties than he.

Although he was devoted to the numerous duties imposed by his public and civic activities, he never allowed temporal affairs to divert his
attention from the demands of a higher call—those of religion. He was an earnest, zealous, and constant adherent of the Presbyterian faith, but his interest was not limited to that particular denomination, for it included religion in its wider sense.

His friends are proud of the record of his life, and the memory of his personal associations with us all is particularly delightful. That he loved his fellowmen speaks well for him; that they in turn inspired, reciprocated, and in many cases merited his love speaks well for them. We can truthfully say that he has given a goodly portion of his life to public service for which the noble satisfaction of work well done has been his only compensation.

We recall what Seneca so well says: "The industrious husbandman plants trees of which he himself will never see a berry." Such was the life of our departed friend.

By his death his family, this society, and the people of Allegheny County have sustained a great loss, and we wish to note here the sorrow and regret that we feel at his having been called from among us.

His was indeed a life well spent. Symbolic of him was a motto ever on his desk: "The faults of our brothers we write upon the sands; their virtues on the tables of love and memory."

He accepted life and found it good: he was a man.

Gregg L. Neel

GEORGE E. ALTER

In the death of George E. Alter on August 18, 1940, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, as well as the community, suffered a distinct loss. Mr. Alter was born on May 8, 1868, in Springdale, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, the son of Elias and Martha Ferson Alter. A trustee of this society since 1933, he came naturally by his interest in Pennsylvania history, since he was a descendant of Jacob Alter and Joseph Ritner, two prominent figures in Pennsylvania history.

Jacob Alter came to America in 1753, took the oath of general allegiance at Ephrata, Pennsylvania, in 1778, and served as a private in the Second Battalion of the Pennsylvania Line in the Revolution. After a stay in Cumberland County, he removed sometime between 1804 and
1808 to Washington County. He served seven consecutive terms from 1799 to 1805 as a member of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania. One of Jacob Alter's daughters, Susanna, married Joseph Ritner of Washington County, who, after six years' service as a member and speaker of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, became governor in 1835.

In his four years' service as governor, Joseph Ritner made his mark in Pennsylvania history, first, as a determined advocate of the public school, and second, when in his annual message of 1836 he referred to slavery in such terms as to elicit Whittier's commendation:

Thank God for the token! One lip is still free,
One spirit untrammled, unbending one knee;
Like the oak of the mountain, deep-rooted and firm,
Erect, when the multitude bends to the storm.

After a public-school education and a short term as a draftsman in the office of David Boyd, a Pittsburgh architect, Mr. Alter studied shorthand and typewriting at night school. Becoming a stenographer, he took up the study of law in the office of the late William Yost, Esq., and was admitted to practice on December 16, 1893. In 1902 he took in marriage Miss Diana Swanton, formerly of Springdale, where they made their home.

Almost at once Mr. Alter entered on public life, first as auditor of Springdale Township; then as a member of the Pennsylvania General Assembly during the sessions of 1909-11-13, and during the latter session as speaker of the House of Representatives. In December, 1920, he was appointed attorney general of Pennsylvania and in 1922 became an unsuccessful candidate for the office of governor.

In spite of a large and growing practice, Mr. Alter was prominent and active in the work of law revision, first in 1911, with respect to Pennsylvania tax and corporation law, and in 1915, in the codification of the law of decedents' estates, the decedents' code of Pennsylvania becoming a model for decedents' laws in many states, notably New York. In 1919 he was a member of the commission on amendments and revision of the state constitution, and after 1923, an active member of the American Law Institute and the National Commission on Uni-
form State Laws. He was a member of many of the important committees of the Pennsylvania Bar Association and president for the years 1924 and 1925.

For more than sixty years Mr. Alter had been a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Springdale, and for many years he served as chairman of the board of directors of the Parting of the Ways Home.

He was survived by Mrs. Alter, four children, and a sister.

Although quiet in manner, his geniality made him a favorite with all. He was a member of many clubs and one of the founders of the Pennsylvania Society which meets annually in New York City.

HENRY OLIVER EVANS

MARCUS RAUH

Newly elected a trustee of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and a member of this organization since 1913, Marcus Rauh, a distinguished leader in the business, civic, and philanthropic life of Pittsburgh, died on October 17, 1940, at the age of eighty-one.

Marcus Rauh possessed in rare measure all fine qualities of character. A man of broad human sympathies, he loved his fellow men. His fine personality soon impressed itself upon all with whom he came in contact. To know him as it was given to us to know him was to love him, a man clean in thought and in deed, pure gold without alloy.

With no least thought of reward, praise, or fame, he labored long, earnestly, and to good effect for the common weal. His utterly unselfish and lifelong devotion to the public welfare needs no comment here. That, truly, is a high test of a man. He met it fairly.

Native to him were qualities of leadership that all with whom he associated were quick to recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate. His leadership was attained and held through a rectitude of purpose and earnestness of soul that made him zealous and able in any cause he championed. He was a good listener, and patient with views opposed to his own; with confidence in his own position, he was yet ever open to argument and conviction. His ripe judgment and wise counsel have been a great asset to us all.

We know that, apart from kith and kin, no group of associates stood
higher in his affection than the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

That he loved his fellow men speaks well for him: that they in turn inspired, reciprocated, and in many cases merited his love speaks well for them. He practiced the sacred rites of Friendship in a delightful manner.

As we remember the past years, we thank God that we were privileged to enjoy fellowship with this dear one who has gone. Tenderly we recall the gentle thoughtfulness of others that made him so forgetful of self. The memory of his life will be a help and a blessing to us all. We miss him today and we are going to continue to miss him more and more as the years go by.

His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the World,
This was a man.

Gregg L. Neel