ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

On the pages which follow are glimpses of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania over the past century. From humble beginnings at the First Methodist Protestant Church on April 10, 1879, to the present, the Society has had as its principal goal the preservation and dissemination of our region's history. The Society has strived to do this in a wide variety of ways, but chief emphasis has always been on library, archival, and museum collections. In this century, publications, tours of historic places, and participation in educational programs and community affairs have augmented these basic thrusts. No one can say that it has always been smooth sailing. Goals have not been clearly perceived, and approaches have often been poorly laid out and pursued. Moreover, the Society, as with all such institutions, has suffered from periodic neglect due to poor leadership or finances, or both. But, remarkably, after each episode of decline, the Society has demonstrated its resiliency and has come back to advance with renewed vigor. Doing so repeatedly for more than a century is perhaps the clearest indicator of all of institutional strength.

One of life's few constants is the inevitability of change. How the Society has changed over 100 years leads one to think about how history and our perceptions of the past have also been dramatically altered. History, as it was written in the nineteenth century, was little more than a parade of disconnected battles and wars and great men. In the classroom, history represented a funnel through which to pour patriotism and good citizenship into presumably blank minds. But history has evolved, especially in the last quarter-century, into something vastly more far-reaching and significant. Now virtually no topic is beyond the scope of Clio's disciples. A broad spectrum of subjects — from the history of contraception in America to econometric analyses of slavery in the antebellum South to psychohistorical studies of hitherto obscure figures — engages the attention of the modern scholar. The historian himself, in the nineteenth century a white, upper-middle or upper-class male with leisure time and the wherewithal to devote to research and writing, is now typically a middle-class professional, frequently female and not always white, associated with a college, university, governmental agency, or state or local historical society.

Where does the Historical Society fit into this portrait of change?
What lies ahead? The modern Society must adapt to meet the diverse needs of the scholar, and its programs and publications should reflect current trends within the discipline. At the same time, the Society is ideally situated between the academic "white tower" and the grassroots of the community as a whole; through the Society in both directions can flow ideas beneficial to the understanding of history by each group. Somewhere within this middle ground, for example, may lie the answer to the vexatious paradox of declining enrollments in college history courses at the same time when public interest runs high in discovering one's "roots." Critical choices about the role of the Society lurk along the path ahead. Among the major challenges are defining how best to reach both general and scholarly audiences without alienating either, and how to modify, expand, or simply to maintain the Society's existing programs in an age of inflation. A sympathetic and dedicated board, guided in its decision-making by a professional staff, must grapple with these questions, and many others, which face the Society in the coming years.

As the reader leafs through these pages, consisting of photographs from the Society's archives, it is hoped that some feeling may come through for the evolutionary change which has taken place, not only in the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, but in how all of us perceive our past.

William F. Trimble
Pittsburgh, April 10, 1879.

For a number of years past, many of the old citizens have expressed the desire to have a meeting called of all the residents, native or foreign, who have resided in the city or vicinity for a period of fifty years (the matter did not assume a definite form until this evening), that they might get together and review old associations, and refresh each other's memories of the past and early history of this place, and as time is making inroads on their number, the day is not far distant when those present and whose heads are already whitened with the frosts of many winters will be called hence, and the places that now know them will know them no more. The secretary and writer of this introductory to the minutes of this association, desires to leave to his successor, this minute in brief, with the hope, in the future, that the work will be more efficiently performed than as has been already done; further that the coming after us, and to occupy our places, will infuse more vigor in keeping alive the association than the originators were in its establishment. It is patent to any intelligent mind that the
THE OLD TIMERS

Indulging in Memories of the Bygone.

An Interesting Gathering of Patriarchs at the First Methodist Protestant Church
Last Night.

Speeches and Letters—Partial List of Old Residents—A Permanent Organization to be Formed.

The meeting Thursday evening in Fifth avenue Methodist Church, Rev. Dr. Murray's, was much larger than any one had anticipated. The call for the meeting was for a gathering of men who had resided in Pittsburgh for fifty years and upwards. There must have been fully two hundred present who came under this class, while in addition thereto many others, including young and old ladies, were attracted, probably by the novelty of the affair. And the proceedings proved sufficiently interesting to hold the unwearied attention of all.

The meeting was organized shortly before eight o'clock by Rev. Dr. Allison being called to the chair. On taking the chair Dr. Allison stated that he presumed the object of the meeting was to talk over old times, and to form an association whereby an exchange of greetings and reminiscences can occasionally be made.

Prayer was then made by Rev. Sproul. Mr. Wm. M. Gormley was elected Secretary, and on motion of Messrs. Jared M. Brush and Wm. A. Herron the following gentlemen were elected Vice Presidents, viz.: Messrs. John Rippy, Louis Peterson, Henry Rea, Reuben Miller, Government.

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Newspapers gave considerable coverage to the first meeting of the "Old Residents." The Commercial Gazette reprinted in its April 16 edition an earlier article published the day after the organizational meeting.
Two years after Gormly's death, the Reverend A. A. Lambing assumed the office of secretary. As secretary, he saw through incorporation of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania in September 1888, and transferral of its collections and meeting place to the Carnegie Free Library in Allegheny City in 1891. Elevated to the presidency a year later, Lambing went on to serve the Society until after 1900.

Burd S. Patterson, secretary after reorganization of the Society in April 1909.
High on the list of priorities in 1909 was construction of a headquarters building. Patterson, secretary, and William H. Stevenson, president, provided the impetus which led to a state appropriation of $25,000 in 1911. This, combined with $10,000 raised during Pittsburgh's sesquicentennial celebration, paid for site acquisition and erection of the building. Construction began in October 1912, and the opening took place on February 17, 1914. Above is a view of the structure as it appeared upon completion.
From the start, architects' plans envisioned expansion. President Stevenson pressed for additional money in the twenties to complete an addition to the rear of the original building. In 1929, a state appropriation of $40,000, augmented by major grants from the Buhl Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and Andrew W. Mellon, permitted the new construction. Rededication ceremonies occurred on October 6, 1931. On the first floor, the new space was utilized, above, as a combined exhibit and lecture hall.

The library, now the upstairs McClintock Room, remained in these cramped quarters from 1914 to 1962.
To celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of steam navigation on western waters, in November 1911, the Historical Society sponsored a cruise from Pittsburgh to New Orleans with a replica of the steamer *New Orleans*. Among the dignitaries on hand was William Howard Taft. The top picture shows the craft under construction at the Elizabeth Marine Ways Company; the bottom how she appeared upon completion.
In 1918, the Society inaugurated publication of the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*. Omar S. Decker was the journal's first editor.
During the 1930s, the Society became firmly established. In 1931, it started the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey. The survey began in September, funded by the Buhl Foundation, the Historical Society, and the University of Pittsburgh, and was headed by Solon J. Buck, former director of the Minnesota Historical Society. For five years, the survey collected historical materials, compiled bibliographies, and prepared and published ten books on Western Pennsylvania history. Here Buck (left) meets with Harold Phelps of the University of Pittsburgh in September 1931.

Government programs such as the NYA, the Federal Writers' Project, and the Federal Archives Project allowed the Society to continue many of its activities through the lean years at the end of the 1930s. Frank B. Sessa of the University of Pittsburgh looks over printer's galleys with Dorothy English, part-time research assistant in 1939.
Tours were popular. Annual motor caravans to historic sites in the area highlighted the Society's programs in the 1930s. Top, the 1934 tour explored the site of General Arthur St. Clair's last dwelling place on Chestnut Ridge east of Pittsburgh. Below, the 1937 tour journeyed to decaying Washington's Mill near Perryopolis.
Top, the Historical Society building in the 1940s. No harder years were there for the Society than this decade. Bottom, Franklin F. Holbrook was editor, librarian, office manager, archivist, and more often than not, janitor.
Much of the Society's collection includes paintings and portraits by and of famous Pittsburghers. This delightful portrait of young Mary Schenley by an unknown artist came to the Society in 1961.

By 1950, Charles A. McClintock had assumed the presidency. McClintock began the Society's fine collection of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania glass. Above, President McClintock (left) and Paul Benedum unveil a new display case.
Boat tours have been summer affairs enjoyed by Society members and guests throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In 1961, the cruise extended from Brownsville up the Monongahela River to Morgantown, West Virginia, aboard the old Chaperon.

The July 1976 tour boarded the Gateway Clipper's Party Liner at Roberto Clemente Park for a trip up the Allegheny River.
Changes to the interior of the Society building have been remarkable. Top, the space now the library in 1949 housed an extensive collection of antique firearms. In 1976, below, it had been transformed into a bright and comfortable research area. A reception attended by trustees and staff reopened the library on April 29, 1976, after addition of the balcony.
In the 1970s, the Society expanded its programs to reach the general public. The Community Service Program, a six-year project funded in part by the Buhl Foundation, included active involvement by the Society with schoolchildren of all ages. In this 1973 picture, former Director Joseph G. Smith holds the rapt attention of a school group on tour at the Society.
Occasionally Society members and guests heard lectures by the rich and famous. Congressman (now Senator) H. John Heinz III speaks informally after an address on "Great-Grandfather's Pittsburgh" in March 1973.

As part of the nation's bicentennial in 1976, the Society published an extensive pamphlet series on Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania history. A special open house, July 4, brought large crowds into the building for special displays commemorating 200 years of American history. Here staff members in costume prepare for the ceremonial bell-ringing.