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# HOMES AND HABITATIONS OF THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY.\*

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BY CHARLES E. MAYO.

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In compliance with a request of the Executive Council that I should prepare a paper descriptive of the homes and habitations of the Minnesota Historical Society from its organization to the present time, together with a brief recital of the salient features and prominent proceedings of the society during that period, I beg leave to submit the following report:

According to the minutes in the record book of the society, a meeting was held at the office of C. K. Smith, Secretary of the territory, on November 15, 1849, for the purpose of organizing a society under the act entitled "An Act to Incorporate the Historical Society of Minnesota," approved October 20, 1849. William H. Forbes was called to the chair, and C. K. Smith was appointed secretary.

Secretary Smith appears to have given the first impulse which led to the organization of the society. His office, in which the first meeting was held, was in the front room (south-east corner) on the first floor of a two-story clapboarded log house on Bench street, known as the "Central House," occupied then, and later, as a hotel and boarding house.

The organization of the society was completed by the election of officers as follows: President, Alexander Ramsey; vice presidents, David Olmsted and Martin McLeod; treasurer, William H. Forbes; secretary, Charles K. Smith. A committee was appointed to draft a constitution and by-laws, and report at a meeting to be held on the second Monday in January, 1850. There is no record of the names of those who were present at this first meeting; but it is believed that Mr. Henry L. Moss is the only survivor of that band of organizers.

\*Read at the monthly meeting of the Executive Council, March 9, 1896.

An annual meeting was held January 1, 1850, in the Methodist church on Market street, when an address was delivered by Rev. Edward D. Neill, on "The French Voyageurs to Minnesota during the Seventeenth Century." Thus early did the society begin its legitimate work.

The adjourned meeting was held at the office of Secretary Smith, January 14, 1850, Judge David Cooper presiding, in the absence of the president and vice presidents, when the constitution and by-laws were reported, amended, and adopted. There were present: L. A. Babcock, M. S. Wilkinson, A. Van Vorhes, M. E. Ames, J. A. Wakefield, C. K. Smith, and H. L. Moss. The constitution provided that the officers, five in number, should constitute an executive council having charge of the affairs of the society; three, according to the by-laws, constituting a quorum.

Under date of February 6, 1850, Prof. Joseph Henry, of the Smithsonian Institution, wrote to Hon. Henry H. Sibley: "In my last report to the regents, I have taken an occasion to allude to the formation of an historical society in the territory of Minnesota, as a laudable example to be followed by other new parts of our union."

The next meeting of the society, of which there is any record, was the annual meeting in the Methodist church on Market street, January 13, 1851, when President Ramsey delivered an address entitled "Our field of historical research." Original papers by Rev. Stephen R. Riggs on "The Dakota Language," and by Henry R. Schoolcraft on "The History and Physical Geography of Minnesota," were read by Martin McLeod and George L. Becker, and were published, as well as the addresses previously mentioned, in the society's annals.

On January 29, 1851, a meeting was held at the brick building known as the "Rice House," in the Council Chamber, on Third street, between Washington and Franklin streets, when a resolution was adopted, approving the project of publishing a Dakota Lexicon, and a committee was appointed to procure subscribers. The work was prepared by Rev. S. R. Riggs, and was published by the Smithsonian Institution under the patronage of this Historical Society. It was highly extolled by literary and scientific men at home and abroad, and served a good purpose in making a name and reputation

for the infant society in literary circles. Col. D. A. Robertson, while in Europe, called on Baron Von Humboldt, and was not a little surprised when the Baron, on learning that his visitor was from Minnesota, took from his shelves a copy of the Dakota Lexicon, and spoke of it in complimentary terms.

November 18, 1851, the office of secretary was declared vacant on account of the absence of Secretary Smith; and Rev. Edward D. Neill was chosen to fill the vacancy. Mr. Neill continued to hold the position of secretary for twelve years.

January 19, 1852, Lieut. J. H. Simpson delivered the annual address in the Methodist church.

February 7, 1853, the annual meeting was held in the hall of the House of Representatives in the Capitol. Martin McLeod read a paper prepared by H. H. Sibley on the "Life and Services of Jean N. Nicollet;" and William H. Forbes read an essay, written by Rev. Mr. Belcourt, on the "Department of Hudson's Bay." At this meeting the thanks of the society were tendered to Hon. H. S. Geyer, of Missouri, for the very lively interest he had taken in increasing the library of the society. This is the earliest mention, in the records, of a library.

At the annual meeting January 17, 1854, a committee was appointed to secure a room in the Capitol for the use of the society. No mention is made in the records of rooms occupied by the society up to this date; and there is no record of occupancy of a room in the Capitol until November 27, 1855, when it is recorded that the society "met for the first time in the hall set apart in the Capitol for their use, and properly furnished with shelves for the reception of books and other donations." At this meeting Theodore French was elected assistant secretary, and Richard Walker, assistant librarian. The minutes state that twenty members were elected, but their names are not recorded. The writer's certificate of membership shows that he was elected at this meeting.

At a meeting of the society at their rooms in the Capitol December 1, 1855, Rev. Mr. Neill reported as a motto, for the society's seal, the words "Lux e tenebris." There was a large attendance, many donations and deposits were made, and



great enthusiasm was manifested. There were fifteen applications for membership, and it is presumed that the applicants were all elected; but the minutes do not show their names.

At the annual meeting January 15, 1856, Col. D. A. Robertson reported the sale of sixty-two life memberships at twenty-five dollars each, the proceeds of which were to be applied to payment on two lots at the corner of Tenth and Wabasha streets, purchased from Vital Guerin for fifteen hundred dollars. A committee was appointed to "take steps" for the laying of the corner stone of a hall to be erected on the society's lots, and, if possible, to procure an address on the occasion, from George Bancroft, Lewis Cass, or Thomas H. Benton. Mr. Neill read a paper on the life and writings of Hennepin.

On February 1, 1856, Hon. H. H. Sibley delivered the annual address, entitled "Reminiscences, Historical and Personal," in which he paid honorable tribute to the character of the Indian trader.

Gabriel Franchere, the last survivor of the party of fifty-seven men sent to the northwest coast by John Jacob Astor and others in 1811, to establish a fur-trading station on the Columbia river, in a letter from New York dated February 18, 1856, addressed to Mr. Sibley, acknowledging the receipt of a copy of his address, said: "One feature attracted my attention in a very pleasing manner, and that was the vindication of the moral character of the first pioneers of the wilderness. You have done ample justice to that much abused and misrepresented class of men, the Indian traders, who have been too much confounded by writers with the *coureurs des bois*, a class of men totally different from the regular trader,—these, the *coureurs des bois*, being generally men of dissolute habits, perverting the Indians by their immorality, and degrading themselves by their licentiousness, whilst the regular trader in his pursuits, although aiming at the realization of acquiring wealth by his intercourse with the savage tribes, yet had always, or at least in most cases, the welfare of the poor untutored Indian in view; indeed his own interest in a commercial point of view, and his personal safety, required the utmost care and prudence to carry out the object in view."

At a special meeting March 21, 1856, the charter having been amended by an act of the legislature providing for the election of an executive council, a council of twenty-five members was elected, eight of whom were non-residents.

The laying of the corner stone of the projected building for the use of the society was celebrated June 24, 1856, with great *éclat*. A procession was formed at the Winslow House, on the corner of Fort and Eagle streets, and marched to the grounds, preceded by a band and accompanied by Sherman's Battery from Fort Snelling, which had won distinction in the Mexican war under the name of the "Flying Artillery." An address was delivered in the open air by the mayor, Hon. George L. Becker, followed by an address from Lieut. M. F. Maury of the United States Coast Survey. The corner stone was laid with Masonic ceremonies. The expense incurred on the excavation and foundation wall having absorbed the available funds of the society, further prosecution of the work was shortly afterward abandoned.

During the year 1856 two meetings were held in the Baldwin school house, which stood on the site of the new government building fronting on Rice Park.

At a meeting of the council January 13, 1858, William H. Kelley was appointed actuary, and continued to serve in that capacity until July, 1859, during which period he did good service in arranging and classifying the collections of the society. At about this time, the society's room in the Capitol being required for the use of the State Auditor, it became necessary to move its property into a smaller room suitable only for storage.

A special meeting of the society was held December 26, 1863, at the room of the St. Paul Library in Ingersoll's Block, when Mr. Neill having resigned the secretaryship, William H. Kelley was elected to fill the vacancy for the unexpired term. February 19, 1864, Charles E. Mayo was elected secretary, and served three years. April 11, 1864, it was voted to rent a small room adjoining the St. Paul Library room, and that such portion of the collection as was thought desirable for exhibition should be moved to the new quarters, which was accordingly done. The society continued to occupy this room for about four years.

May 14, 1866, a committee was appointed to cause the excavation of one or more mounds on Dayton's bluff, on Saturday, May 19th, which was done under the direction of William H. Kelley and Alfred J. Hill, and a minute and elaborate report was made at the next monthly meeting. Hon. J. V. C. Smith, ex-mayor of Boston, and author of books of travel in foreign lands, was present at the meeting, and visited Dayton's bluff to observe the work on the mounds, in which he took a lively interest.

January 21, 1867, J. Fletcher Williams was elected secretary, and served in that capacity until his resignation in 1893, a period of twenty-six years.

May 1, 1867, a number of the members of the society and several invited guests celebrated the centenary of Carver's treaty with the Indians, by a visit to Carver's cave in the afternoon and a meeting at the society's room in the evening, when Rev. John Mattocks read a paper on the life and travels of Capt. Jonathan Carver.

May 15, 1867, the remainder of the library was removed from the Capitol to the room in Ingersoll's Block.

September 26, 1867, the society had a field meeting at Lake Minnetonka for the purpose of excavating some of the mounds in that region. Two mounds were opened, and a number of skeletons were exhumed. The skulls, which were in a good state of preservation, and some pieces of aboriginal pottery, were placed in our cabinet.

Rooms in the basement of the Capitol building having been provided for the society, the council met in their new quarters for the first time, November 9, 1868. The president, Hon. William R. Marshall, made an address appropriate to the occasion.

December 16, 1873, a special meeting was held to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the destruction of tea in Boston Harbor. Rev. John Mattocks and Hon. Aaron Goodrich read original papers relating to the event. There was a good attendance of ladies and gentlemen.

At a meeting of the council March 8, 1875, Henry P. Upham was elected a member of the executive council. The record states that "Mr. Upham, being present, was formally introduced by Mr. Hamilton and made remarks appropriate to the

occasion." Unfortunately, no report of the "remarks" appears in the minutes. The society, recognizing his peculiarly eminent qualifications for the office, improved the first opportunity to elect him as treasurer, which position he has continued to hold without interruption to the present time.

November 8, 1875, Rev. John Mattocks announced the death of Rev. Sterling Y. McMasters, a member of the council, and paid a just and touching tribute to his personal worth, attainments, and services to the society. At the next monthly meeting, December 13th, Gen. Sibley announced the death of Rev. John Mattocks, a member of the council for nearly nineteen years, and read a paper reciting his eminent and faithful services to this society and the community. Dr. McMasters and Mr. Mattocks were warm personal friends, and were highly esteemed as valuable members of the Historical Society.

November 13, 1876, Judge Goodrich offered a resolution providing that no permit for the occupation of grounds belonging to the society should be granted. Gen. Sanborn offered, as a substitute, a resolution requiring the officers of the society to so lease and manage the real estate of the society as to secure the largest income to the society. The substitute was adopted by a vote of seven to three.

At the next meeting, December 11, 1876, Judge Goodrich offered the following resolution: "Resolved, that the resolution offered by Gen. Sanborn and adopted at the last meeting of this council, relative to the leasing of grounds belonging to this society, be expunged from the records, the same having been adopted in violation of the laws of this society." The resolution was voted down by a vote of ten to four. This was the beginning of the "unpleasantness" inaugurated by Judge Goodrich, which finally culminated in the complete vindication of the society as represented by the executive council, through a decision of the Supreme Court. Judge Goodrich manifested a belligerent spirit which soon ripened into open rebellion. Actuated either by disappointment at his failure to receive the highest honors at the bestowal of the society, or by a natural iconoclastic disposition which prompted him to pull down rather than build up, and in emulation of the arch fiend who drew after him the third

part of Heaven's host in reckless and hopeless hostility, he plied his seductive wiles among the staid, conservative members of the executive council, in a determined effort to wrest the management of the affairs of the society from the control of the executive council, and to vest it in the original corporators and their successors elected by the survivors.

Greatly to the surprise of the faithful, he succeeded in detaching from their allegiance some half dozen of the members of the council, most of whom thereafter discontinued their attendance at the monthly meetings. Judge Goodrich, however, was so vindictive and exasperating in his unprovoked attacks on the society, which were parried by Rev. Dr. Neill and Col. Robertson with equal earnestness and irascibility, that, notwithstanding the depletion in numbers, no danger of the lack of a quorum was experienced during this stormy period. Time forbids my enlarging on the merits of the controversy, a published report of which is accessible to the curious.

January 4, 1878, a committee of five was appointed to draft a bill appropriating to the society thirty-five thousand dollars for the erection of a building for its use, and to use their best endeavors to secure its passage by the legislature. A committee of three was also appointed to solicit subscriptions from citizens for the same purpose, conditional on the passage of the legislative bill. About fifteen thousand dollars was eventually subscribed, when, no action having been taken by the legislature, the project was abandoned.

December 9, 1878, the council met in the new apartments in the basement, specially prepared for the society in the addition to the Capitol, just erected. The room vacated by the society was occupied by the Academy of Natural Sciences.

July 3, 1880, the society celebrated, at Minneapolis, the two-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Falls of St. Anthony by Louis Hennepin. Hon. C. K. Davis delivered a scholarly oration, and A. P. Miller read an original poem, followed by addresses by Gov. Ramsey, Gen. Wm. T. Sherman, and Bishop Ireland. A number of military celebrities and dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church from abroad were present, and gave to the celebration a national and international character.

The Capitol building was burned on the night of March 1, 1881. Most of the library of the Historical Society was saved, though many of the books were damaged by being thrown out into the snow. The property was carried across the street and deposited in Unity church. Being fully protected by insurance, the society sustained no loss, aside from the destruction of some articles of value which could not be replaced.

A special meeting was called at the office of the president, Gen. Sibley, on March 3rd, when it was voted to move the effects into a room in the southeast corner of the Market House basement. The society continued to occupy this room for a library and for meetings until the completion of the new Capitol, when the rooms now occupied by the society were provided by the state authorities. The first meeting in this room in the Market House was on March 14, 1881.

April 9, 1883, the executive council met for the first time in its new rooms in the Capitol. President Ramsey and other members of the council made remarks on the gratifying fact that we had again resumed work in permanent and comfortable quarters. Judge Flandrau introduced the following resolution, which was adopted: "Resolved, That the Minnesota Historical Society congratulates its friends and patrons on resuming its former quarters in the rebuilt Capitol after two years, during which time its work has been much embarrassed, and on the fact of our securing such spacious and safe apartments."

From this date the history of the society is to most of you familiar; and here, having seen the society, after a voyage attended with some turbulence and much tribulation, safely moored in its haven of rest, and having traced its wanderings through discord and adversity to harmony and prosperity, my recital reaches its natural conclusion.













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