

## Celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary

K. E. C.

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## **CELEBRATING THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

Fifty year birthdays are not uncommon but in a state itself less than one hundred years old, the accomplishment of fifty years of effective and continuous work recording and preserving history is indeed an achievement. Although historical organizations existed prior to 1892, when the Iowa State Department of History and Archives was established, the true date of historical work in this state dates from that decade. In 1892 the "Historical Department" was organized under Charles Aldrich; later in the decade Prof. Benj. F. Shambaugh began his life's work with the older State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa City. It is unusual that a state should produce at the same time men with the same zeal and enthusiasm for their work as Charles Aldrich, the founder of this Department, and Prof. Shambaugh.

Thus in a larger sense, 1942 marks the fiftieth anniversary, not alone of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, but also of the awakened appreciation by Iowans five decades ago to the value and worth of recording their past, to a conception that truly the days were hastening on, to a realization that a knowledge of those days ought to be preserved.

Quite appropriately there appears in this issue of *THE ANNALS OF IOWA* a brief outline of the history of the Department over the last half century. And equally appropriate, that sketch is written by Ora Williams, long time friend of Charles Aldrich and Edgar R. Harlan, and now himself, since April, 1939, Curator of the institution. Mr. Williams has known on terms of intimacy all the curators since the beginning in 1892, as well as having been well acquainted with the leaders in Iowa's governmental circles over an even longer period.

The Golden Anniversary observance of the Department, conditioned by the demands of war, were simple and in keeping with the occasion.

Special displays were exhibited in the corridors and halls of the building during the whole week April 5-11. Due to the impact of the war, military themes were strongly in evidence. Extensive poster and cartoon displays of World War I and World War II were shown on the first floor and in the rotunda. Case displays of military company reports and documents of Iowa units from Civil War years, recruitment posters of that war and of the Spanish American War were likewise exhibited. Through the courtesy of the Davenport Public Museum and its director, John Bailey, a special case was on display showing samples of the excellent Mexican and South American materials in that museum. The Iowa Antique Association likewise exhibited a case of glassware, pendants, ornaments and jewelry of past years owned by members of that association.

On Wednesday afternoon, April 8, a special exhibition of old time costumes and dress was held in the West Portrait Gallery. Not "stage costumes," but authentic originals, the dresses represented periods of style from 1878 to 1913. Comprised of gowns belonging to the Department, and others loaned by Mrs. L. B. Schmidt of Ames, Iowa, a splendid Norwegian dress loaned by the courtesy of Prof. S. S. Reque, director of the Norwegian-American Museum of Decorah, Iowa, and Mr. Bailey of the Davenport Public Museum, the exhibit attracted universal interest among adults and schools groups as well. Modeled for the occasion by members of the Iowa Antique Association, each dress was accompanied by a brief description and explanation of its salient points of style and material. A series of photographs and *Godey's Lady Book* and other well known style journals of yesteryear were displayed in connection with the exhibit.

#### HISTORY AND WAR

Thursday, April 9, a small informal conference attended by officers of local historical societies in Iowa, and other interested friends, was held in the West Portrait Gallery of

the Historical Building to discuss "The Role of Historical Agencies in War Time." All were agreed to the fundamental proposition that a knowledge of and an appreciation of the past was essential to good citizenship, moreover, that such a knowledge was essential to a determined and continued prosecution of the war. The preservation and the dissemination of that essential knowledge was deemed an immediate obligation of both state and local historical groups.

The conference was primarily concerned with what specific steps the local societies and interested friends could take to be of service in war time. It was felt that each organization should study all ways in which it could contribute to the war effort. The conclusion was that the role of historical agencies was essentially that of preservation, and of publicizing the information pertinent to the current struggle. While local societies should not neglect the interest in the pioneer eras, their primary attention at the moment should be on the absorbing matter of the war—its prosecution and the community's contribution thereto—and keeping a record thereof.

The following were among the suggestions offered and recommended:

1. Each society—or locally interested friend—should prepare and keep on file with the public library, at the county seat at least, a current alphabetical list of all enlisted and drafted men from the town or county. It was urged that the occasional appearance of such lists in the local newspapers although helpful, are difficult to quickly locate, moreover such names are not alphabetized. A flexible card list was recommended.
2. Each public library in each town in the state was urged to begin and maintain a regular file on "County War Activities," to contain clippings, articles, news, citations, pictures of those activities in that county relating to World War II.
3. Since the various rationing boards, selective service boards, and their kindred agencies are all federal units of

the United States government, and therefore all their records will eventually leave the community and return to Washington at the conclusion of the war, it was recommended strongly that each county make arrangements for maintaining in the county all the possible records, duplicates, releases, lists, of the local activities of the county boards. It was recommended that the public libraries or the county court house be sought as a repository.

4. It was further recommended that the local historical societies urge upon each of the volunteer organizations in the county the wisdom of providing for the permanent preservation of a careful record of their current activities, as a local unit in the larger state and nation-wide plans of the particular organization. In many cases this could be accomplished, it was pointed out, by arranging to receive duplicate reports which the local group prepared for the state or regional offices of the organization.

5. Each participant in the civilian war work, as a machinist, a laborer, a technician, each participant in the war efforts on the field or at the battle fronts should be encouraged to keep a diary or journal. Those societies which have a sizable reserve fund were strongly recommended to make a project of presenting a small pocket diary to each man and boy enlisted or drafted into the armed services. Many rich returns from such a step are certain.

6. Pictures and photographs of boys leaving for service, boys in uniform, enlisting, should be promptly taken and kept by the society. Likewise photographs of alterations in the city, in business structures, in factories erected owing to the demands of war should similarly be taken and preserved.

7. Each local society or locally interested friend of history was urged to plan patriotic programs and meetings of a community nature, tying in The Peoples War with the earlier military record of the county. This would mean somewhat a diminution of emphasis upon the pioneer eras.

Complimenting the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa City on its clipping project, whereby approximately

100 Iowa newspapers are clipped each week for relevant war items relating to the state, the conference returned once more to its theme that history is indeed a vital link in the war effort. To neglect its force is to cripple the potential strength of the nation.

Recognizing that this epoch-making struggle of world powers can never be understood without recourse to the essential records, the conference unanimously adopted the following resolution, later mailed to all chairmen of county rationing and selective service boards:

"RESOLVED. That it is the sense of this conference that we earnestly urge all local boards, commissions and other agencies having to do with any phase of war work, and especially as to the personnel of the fighting forces and the home front, to use their utmost diligence in the care and preservation of all records pertaining to their work. All such are strongly urged to cooperate with local libraries, county officers and the state historical agencies in the permanent preservation of all important records."

Thursday evening, April 9, the Golden Anniversary Dinner of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives was held at the Hotel Fort Des Moines. Friends of the Department and of Iowa history were warmly greeted and the Department congratulated upon its fiftieth anniversary by Governor George A. Wilson, chairman of the board of trustees of the institution. Other speakers included the Hon. F. F. Faville, former member of the Iowa State Supreme Court, and member of the board of trustees from 1921 to 1933, and Curator Ora Williams.

The address of the evening, "Wisconsin and Iowa, Historical Neighbors," was delivered by Dr. Edward P. Alexander, Superintendent of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. A native of Centerville, Iowa, educated in Drake University and the State University of Iowa before later studies in the East and his work with the New York State Historical Society, Dr. Alexander assumed his present post with the Wisconsin historical society in October, 1941. Con-

trasting and comparing the developments of the two states from the days when they enjoyed the one territorial government to the later days of the Grangers and agricultural specialization and political leadership, Dr. Alexander's address was a fitting conclusion to the week of formal observances.

The second half of the first century has commenced. It is hoped that the next fifty years will be even more productive of good to Iowa history than were those just past. In the words of Mr. Williams, the Iowa State Department of History and Archives is now no longer a hobby, it is an institution.

K. E. C.

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