

The Editor's Perspective

THESE ARE DIFFICULT TIMES for almost any agency funded by state tax revenues in almost any state. Certainly the State Historical Society of Iowa, a state agency that uses some state tax revenue to support the *Annals of Iowa*, is not immune from those difficulties. In such situations, the appropriate role of government in supporting history becomes a contested issue.

Ambivalence about how to fund the work of the state's historical institutions is not new, of course. Rebecca Conard's new book, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (University of Iowa Press, 2002), shows that Shambaugh wrestled with similar issues when he was superintendent of the State Historical Society of Iowa from 1907 to 1940.

Most readers of the *Annals of Iowa* will not need to be convinced of the importance of public support for historical institutions. You know that much of the work that is so essential for providing the resources needed to produce the kind of articles you read in this journal—work such as collecting, preserving, and cataloging historical materials—goes on behind the scenes. As a result, such work may not be particularly appealing to private funding sources. Yet it is in the long-term *public* interest of any civilized society to preserve the records of its deeds for posterity.

You are also aware that historians have made significant strides in recent decades toward making history more inclusive—making history the story of *all* of us, not just those with the resources to preserve their story and to support those who would retell it. Some of that progress is the result of the individual interests of academic historians and the cultural changes that shape their interests. But the increasing inclusiveness of *public* history is made possible at least in part by *public* funding for historical institutions. Public funding frees historical institutions from the expectations that often accompany private donations.

Public-private partnerships can, of course, have significant benefits for both parties. They make possible the preservation

and processing of the materials left by such prominent Iowans as the Hubbell family. But even those benefits are maximized when the public work is grounded in a solid core of public funding.

Furthermore, such partnerships may be harder to come by if the subjects are less well connected. What if we want to preserve traditional barns built by average Iowa farm families? Or collect, preserve, process, and interpret materials related to Mexican-American families with histories extending back to the early twentieth century in Muscatine, West Liberty, Mason City, and elsewhere across the state? In such cases, and in many more, we will need to rely heavily on public funding.

I hope you agree that it is important to preserve and build on the gains we have made in making the history of Iowa more inclusive. If so, it is a case that must be made; it cannot be assumed that all citizens and their representatives share it. As state budget cuts go deeper and deeper, core functions of the State Historical Society—its historic preservation, museum, library and archives, education, and, yes, publications programs—are increasingly at risk. We need your help to maintain essential state support for them.

As we enter a new political campaign season, readers of the *Annals of Iowa* need to make your voices heard—in conversations with other members of your communities, in letters to the editor of your local newspapers, in forums where issues are being raised with legislative and gubernatorial candidates, in letters to those candidates, and wherever else you can. Tell them why the work done by the State Historical Society of Iowa is important to you and your descendants—and to *all* Iowans, present and future. And tell them that you believe that maintaining public funding is essential to continue that work.

Good government is the result of a vigorous discussion of the critical issues it addresses. Everyone with a keen interest in the preservation and interpretation of the history of the state that this government represents needs to be a part of such a discussion. Raise your voice!

—Marvin Bergman, editor

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