

preserving the history that is being made as in that which has been accomplished. It is our hope that many will join in both pledges.

In the various observances which will make up the celebration of the semi-centennial detailed programs will be announced from time to time. The climax of the celebration will be in the week April 5-11.

K. E. G.

LET'S KEEP A DIARY!

Almost every one of us has, at some time in our lives, kept a diary. In most instances the diary was soon abandoned when the initial enthusiasm died and the first obstacles arose to its continuance. Yet although we smile indulgently when admitting it in public, still most of us remember with pleasure our experience as a diarist.

Too long, however, we have relegated the keeping of diaries to the young, the immature, the sentimentalists, or classed it among those things we would like to do, but "just have not got around to doing yet." Moreover, for too long too many of us have felt that keeping a diary was akin to an unwarranted conceit, that one's thoughts and opinions were worth the keeping. Fundamentally we all think so, but we have hesitated to declare it in the overt act of starting a diary.

The editor believes, very strenuously, that if what one does is worth doing, then it also is worth making a note of, especially of what one thinks. For those who place a humble estimate upon their role in life, let them remember that history is more and more recognizing that it is the complex problems of the common man and his society that makes up much of the complicated whole. Besides, as Lincoln might have phrased it, the Lord surely loved the common man, for he made so many of them.

Keeping a diary is no juvenile whim, no immature enthusiast's fancy. On the contrary, keeping a diary should

appeal to the intelligent and busy adults, to the public spirited, to men of high and low degree. Moreover, a consideration of what a diary is will quickly demonstrate that it justifies all the effort and continued thought every good diary deserves.

It is hoped that a large number of thoughtful readers may be persuaded to begin this pleasant and venerable practice, we discuss briefly three kinds of diaries. Although all diaries must be kept by individuals, there are, depending upon their emphasis, the personal, the family, and the public diaries and diarists.

There are good reasons for keeping a personal diary. A salesman keeps a careful set of figures showing his record in his territory; a doctor maintains a case history on each of his patients; a farmer painstakingly checks the pedigree of his stock. Who among these keeps a check upon himself? Is it more important that a farmer should know the seasonal variations in the weight of his hogs, the acreage of each of his crops, than that he know or record what he has thought and what he has done? If it seems common sense that the accumulated notes of one's weekly or monthly sales, or marketing record, is of importance, then surely of equal importance to a man should be the weekly notes of what he thought, his judgments of matters personal and business.

Furthermore, a private personal diary can be used to help the individual navigate himself. Several years ago a college dean told the editor that at the twenty-fifth reunion of his college class a member confided to him that he had not had an original thought since he left school! The tragedy was, the dean said, no confession was necessary. Possibly such a person would not keep a diary, but we hopefully believe that even such could profit from scanning his diary-record.

For these and other excellent reasons, Let's Keep a Diary!

But private journals are always something more than just personal diaries. Thus every person's diary is a partial record of the family. We believe with conscious thought

that such a personal-family diary might become an even more valuable family record.

Just as of right there ought to be an understanding of the history of nations and of the local community, so ought there to be an understanding of the history of each family by its members. We speak here of something far more than a mere genealogical chart. It takes information to make a history of nation or family. The diary offers for the family just that.

Such a record is useful and interesting. What man now living on the middle western lands or in the middle western cities of the Mississippi Valley but would give much to know WHY and HOW and the first RESULTS of his forebearers coming from the East to settle in that fertile valley, one hundred, seventy, twenty, or-what-the-number of years ago? What family but would want to know, or would profit in knowing, what their members thought of Lincoln, of the railroad schemes and speculations of the nineteenth century, how the family contributed to the building of the line through their town? What part did the family take in the farm and third party movements of the day? What did the family think of the Progressive Era of a La Follette, a Cummins, of their contemporaries, the Allison and the Aldriches? How did the head-of-the-house feel about the first automobile he saw? Surely such a knowledge by a later generation contributes to significant living.

If such a diary-journal of the past has value, the same can be said of a record of the events of today, kept for the next generation. What farmer has kept a record of his struggles in the twenties and thirties, of his views and responses to the various federal and state proposals for "agricultural relief?" What business man who climbed the mountains in the bull market years of the twenties has kept a personal record of those days, and of the debacle of 1929? What men who helped to organize and operate the NRA in Iowa and the middle west have written a line about the Blue Eagle?

Who would be so bold as to say that his son or grandson would not read with profit and keen interest twenty

years hence such a record of farm, office, shop, or laboratory, of home and community?

Such records can be found in the newspapers and in books, you say, why then a family diary, or any diary? So far as the individual is concerned, the newspapers, as the lawyers would say, is but "hearsay evidence," usually, that is, second hand evidence. The newspaper has its definite values, and important ones. But the superiority of the diary for the purposes of a family record is that it is of You, your actions, your problems, your thoughts. The personal family diary translates into the color of a personality the dimmed outlines of the daily record; it gives the personal touch to the sometimes be-numbing vastness of today's impersonal March of Events.

There are further reasons for keeping a family diary quite apart from the information-interest side. With the increasing urbanization of our whole society, the dependence of the family one upon another has sharply lessened; the gulfs between generations have widened. All too often there arise those "who knew not Joseph," those who do not know the forces in the background of their family, and hence "do not understand." A well kept family journal contributes much to developing that understanding and harmony of purposes upon which family life depends. In an urban age we can not take that harmony for granted. Moreover, although its importance is often exaggerated by ancestral organizations, there is a genuine value in a sense of "belongingness," or identity, with a community, a society, a nation. Through a diary kept by a member of the family this is the more easily possessed by each generation in the recorded chain of contributions to, participation in community efforts by the family and its circle of intimates. A family diary may produce pride, but it will also produce understanding.

It is a truism, we so often overlook, that matters of national and local interests merge continually, that the border line is never fixed. Thus as one may point his personal diary for the benefit and information of the family, so too may one point or emphasize in his record those matters per-

taining more largely to the public interest. For instance we know of a man who commenced keeping a diary September 1, 1939, the day the war broke out in Europe. The primary purpose of this diary was to record one man's changing views, opinions, or feelings about the enveloping war. Though it has grown to be more than just that its primary interest remains, to reflect the national or public concern as seen and felt by himself, one single man.

Then too, quite often what one records in his diary as a personal affair includes much of public interest. The civil War army physician who wrote of the medicines he used, the incidence of disease in his camp—and diseases took more Northern soldiers than did Southern bullets—his comrades' attitude toward their stubborn opponents, and of religious life in the army, thought he was writing a private diary, but all he recorded was also a part of a larger whole. Charles Mason, Iowa's first chief justice, wrote a personal diary during most of his life. He thought of it as such when he wrote of his work as Commissioner of the Patent Office under Franklin Pierce, when he mentioned the developing division of agriculture in his office, when he discussed Iowa politics, when he noted problems of patronage in the national government. But Charles Mason likewise wrote for the larger whole.

It is obvious that in many cases the private diary is "affected with public interest." How much richer would be our understanding of the post Civil War era if all our Iowa governors had kept a diary? How much they could have contributed to our knowledge of the new problems of agriculture, the Granger Laws, the quarrel of the Radicals under Charles Sumner and Thad Stevens with Andrew Johnson of Tennessee. Where is the journal of the Iowa leaders in the Greenback and Populism movements of yesteryear? What banker has preserved a journal of his affairs under the first days of the National Banking Act of 1863, or of the first operational years of the Federal Reserve Act of 1913? Where are the personal diaries of those leaders in the Iowa Farm Bureau movement twenty-five years ago?

All of these private diaries are obviously "affected

with public interest." But so far as is known they either do not exist as personal or family records, or else are known by their rarity.

For a governor, a business executive, a struggling farm leader to keep a diary is admittedly not easy. But for those in places of high trust in private or public life, the editor pleads for an awakened sense of public responsibility to "keep the record clear." He is aware that keeping a diary a public diary, demands an unusual degree a perception of the responsibilities of one's opportunities as a leader. We do not expect many such frank full and forthright diarists as that White House trio, the two Adamses, father and son, John and John Quincy, and James K. Polk. But we do hope for a growing number of journal-diaries kept by those within our state who have and are contributing signally to the history of the times. This is but honoring the people who have honored them by recognition and trust. Even an "edited," selected diary would be of great value.

In these crucial days and probably years the importance of recording our experiences as individuals, as organizational heads, as a state and as a people should be pike-staff plain. Again, let us say, if what America is trying to do is worth the doing, then it is worth the record of her humble servants. How soberly thrilling to a generation hence will be a daughter's reading of her mother's diary of the days of World War II, her bouts with the budget, the adoption of clever and shrewd expedients to stretch the inelastic dollar? How much can the educator of today contribute to the record of the 'College Man and the Forties' by a diary? Obvious are the contributions of the numerous mayors, members of draft boards, rationing commissions, volunteer committees, and all manner of service organizations.

Let's Keep a Diary!

As a confirmed diarist, perhaps a few suggestions for those who will undertake to keep a diary during the coming years may be in order.

First begin. Select a date to commence, then . . . Begin!

Provide yourself with a bound book or journal which allows sufficient space for your entries. The individual entry should be at least five lines to be of value, and best if it will allow at least fifteen.

Plan a regular time for making your entries. Some will like the evening, as do most people, including the Adamses and Charles Mason. Others will prefer the morning, like the present Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson. Choose for yourself, but be consistent.

Do not permit a missed day or days, or even a week to bring a feeling of defeat. It is the continuity that counts, keep your eye on that essential to success. An average between a dozen and fifteen entries a month is good.

Make it fun. Keep on the watch for the significant item, the illustrative detail . . . the housewife who bought a hundred pounds of sugar in the "sugar scare" in the fall of 1939, etc. Include personalities, give your own opinions. Enjoy your diary.

And Lastly, preserve it. Keep it in a regular place, keep it secure. Other people will accept the value you yourself place upon it. If your diary is worth making it is worth keeping. See that it is safely provided for in the family, or arrange that it be eventually placed with some public or private depository, such as the Iowa Department of History and Archives. Remember, you can place whatever restrictions you wish upon its keeping.

But in any event, LET'S KEEP A DIARY!

FRED L. MAHANNAH

Assistant Curator

Whatever he did, he did with his might. These words describe Fred L. Mahannah. Life was serious business to him worthy of all the thought, energy, and devotion at his command. Service to him meant working and not dreaming, deeds and not wishful thinking.

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