

Dedication Day

Dedication day — Wednesday, August 31, 1960— arrived, hot and sticky. Members of the American Association for State and Local History had been arriving throughout the previous day in order not to miss the two programs that had been set up for 9:30 a.m., an hour and a half before the dedication of the Centennial Building. The programs arranged were most appropriate — the subject — “New Directions and Traditional Functions in Our Local Historical Societies” was held in Conference Room No. 2 and “The Historical Society Magazine — Does It Have a Future?” was the stimulating program assigned to Conference Room No. 1. Those who arrived early were delighted to find the Centennial Building completely air-conditioned — one of the few places in Iowa City that afforded them comfort from the blistering heat outside.

The dedication of the Centennial Building took place at 11 a.m. An unfortunate conflict — State Day at the State Fair in Des Moines — prevented Governor Herschel Loveless and scores of legislators from attending the dedication services. Fully three hundred were present, however, being almost equally divided between members and

Dedication Program

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Centennial Building

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31, 1960, 11 A.M.

PRESIDING

Curator William R. Hart, President, State Historical Society of Iowa

INVOCATION

Dr. J. Raymond Chadwick, President, Iowa Wesleyan College

GREETINGS

Honorable Herschel C. Loveless, Governor of Iowa

Dr. Harvey H. Davis, Provost, State University of Iowa

Dr. Clifford L. Lord, President, American Association for State and Local History

Dr. S. K. Stevens, President, Association of Historic Sites Administrators

REMARKS

Hon. Scott Swisher, State Representative, Johnson County

Clarence W. Moody, Past President, Iowa Daily Press Association

Dr. Leslie W. Dunlap, Director, University of Iowa Libraries

INTRODUCTIONS

Distinguished Visitors: Dr. William J. Petersen, Superintendent, State Historical Society of Iowa

Curators of the Society: Curator W. Howard Smith

PRESENTATION OF KEYS TO CENTENNIAL BUILDING

Presentation by Burdette Higgins, Architect, Tinsley, Higgins, Lighter and Lyon

Acceptance by Curator Jim H. Nesmith, Chairman, Centennial Building Committee

BENEDICTION

Right Reverend Monsignor C. H. Meinberg, St. Mary's Parish

friends of the Society in Iowa and visiting dignitaries from over half the states in the Union and two Canadian provinces. Governor Loveless sent the following message to the Superintendent:

Since I can't be present personally, I do want to send my warm regards to those in attendance and to add my congratulations to our own State Historical Society on the happy occasion of your moving into the Centennial Building.

For the benefit of the visitors, I might say that we citizens of Iowa are deeply proud of our State Historical Society, which is one hundred three years old, this year. We are proud of our Society's outstanding publication and research program, and proud of its front rank among states in the presentation of Iowa's history.

We have long looked forward to the day when the State Historical Society's collection of Iowana — the largest in the country — could be housed in one appropriate building. That day has now arrived, and on behalf of the citizens of Iowa, I pay tribute to the Society, its Board and staff, and you, the Director.

Following the presentation of the keys by Architect Burdette Higgins to Curator Jim H. Nesmith, chairman of the building committee, those present entered the Centennial Building and inspected it from sub-basement to its fifth floor — or level. The number of well-wishers was so great that, although 140 reservations had been made for the Dedication luncheon, 210 actually partook of the delicious repast at the University Athletic Club and heard splendid papers by Dr.

Floyd C. Shoemaker, secretary emeritus of the State Historical Society of Missouri, and Russell W. Fridley, director of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Dr. Shoemaker, who served almost fifty years as head of the State Historical Society of Missouri, and who in 1960 became the Consultant and Secretary Emeritus of that Society, addressed the Centennial audience in part as follows:

This occasion is truly memorable and I take great pride in having been invited to a place on your program. We all are especially favored in being guests of the State Historical Society of Iowa at the dedication of its Centennial Building. . . .

Through the decades Iowa has ranked first in literacy in our nation in addition to maintaining its reputation for tall corn and its record contribution of citizens to Long Beach, California. Iowa has always stood high in education and in preservation of its history. It is indeed fitting that your Centennial Building should be a capstone of your cultural accomplishments. It will always be pointed to with pride by the citizens of this state, and generations now unborn will look upon it as proof of the patriotic care taken by their ancestors in the historical heritage of the State of Iowa. . . .

Most of us who believe in state and local history have rested our case on hope, pride, and work. You in Iowa have added more abundant work. There need not be exclusion of either foreign or state history, but if state history is to survive as a living force above an antiquarian and museum study, other states must follow the trail you are blazing in the State of Iowa. . . .

Dr. Petersen, you have proved yourself to be an able historian and scholar, a collector of historical materials, a successful popularizer of history, a fund raiser, and a public relations expert. You have measured up to the responsibilities of a difficult job and can take great pride in your highly successful career.

Citizens of Iowa, you have just pride in the contributions and accomplishments of your State Historical Society. Your Centennial Building is a challenge to your own people and to the people of all the states in the American nation. I hope the challenge will be met in the fine spirit you have presented it. Your Centennial Building will be a lasting *Memorial* to your great pride in Iowa and I also believe it will be a *Monument* to your future contributions to the history and culture of your great state.

The second speaker at the noon luncheon was Russell W. Fridley, director of the Minnesota Historical Society, who spoke in part as follows:

The story of the State Historical Society of Iowa — like that of similar organizations largely supported by public funds — reflects the same initial hopes, the small beginnings, the minute first budget — in this instance only \$250 — the continuing endeavor to grow and expand in influence, the constant experimentation that met with occasional success and frequent failure, the periods of neglect and stagnation, and the all too infrequent periods of strong leadership that made possible those rare leaps forward — one of which we observe today. . . .

The Centennial Building is the first home the Iowa Society has owned. This fact in itself is likely to affect the future character of the institution. The growth of the Society in its second century will doubtless be accompanied by new opportunities and challenges. Its basic purposes — the collection, preservation, and dissemination of

Iowa's history — will remain unchanged, but the means it chooses to achieve these ends are certain to differ from those employed during its first century. It is obvious, I think, that the historical society of 1960 must respond with imagination and innovation to the problems presented by an aging nation and a rapidly changing world.

The publications programs of historical societies offer one of the best and most neglected means of explaining an institution's purposes, reaching various age and interest groups, and disseminating and interpreting that which is meaningful in state and local history. But printing is expensive. This brings us to one of the major dilemmas of the historical society of 1960: how much scholarly activity can such an institution afford? How much popularizing should it do? . . .

MacKinlay Kantor delivered a powerful address at the evening dinner that held the audience spellbound. His brilliant, soul-searching speech — "The Historical Novelist's Obligation to History" — together with those quoted in part above, will be published in full by the State Historical Society of Iowa. Mr. Kantor's address closed a day of dedication, not only for the Centennial Building but also for the cause of state and local history.