

Organization of the Institute

The Henry County Institute of Science at Trenton, Iowa, was the product of George Miller's planning and leadership. Just when the project was launched the records do not disclose, but during the summer of 1869, he built on his property the two-story brick structure that was to become the home of an Iowa prototype of the Institute he had helped establish in Pennsylvania thirty-six years earlier. By December of that year the building was ready for occupancy, and so a supper was given by the citizens of Trenton to raise money to provide furniture.

Although George Miller must have initiated the organization, his health did not permit him to take an active part in the final preliminary meetings of the Trenton citizens. He became seriously ill on Christmas Day, 1869, and died on the last day of that year. Interested persons in the community met on December 29, 1869, and organized the Henry County Institute of Science, with twenty-four charter members. At this meeting the constitution and by-laws recommended by a committee, appointed two days previously, were adopted and officers were elected.

J. C. Green was chosen president, Mrs. N. Hull vice-president, Fannie Nevins secretary, Jacob Morrison treasurer, C. C. Turney librarian, and Q. M. Noel corresponding secretary. The committee of five managers included A. B. Montgomery, Francis McCray, Henry Hipwell, A. J. Wilson, and Abram Stedwell. On the following day the managers organized themselves as a "Body Corporate to be known as the Henry County Institute of Science." After the death of Miller, his heirs, respecting his wishes, deeded the building to the Institute, to be retained by that organization as long as it maintained a library in the "hall", as it came to be called.

The articles of incorporation stated that the object of the Institute was "the promotion of the Arts and Sciences." The preamble of the constitution, however, gave a more complete statement of the purpose of the organization, in the following words: "The progress of civilization is calculated to stimulate mankind to increase the exertion in the acquisition and diffusion of general knowledge. In no age or country has ignorance been established honorable; on the contrary, the effort to increase and systemize information has ever been deemed commendable and desirable. Of all the plans devised for so important a purpose, none seems better adapted to the end, than the

forming of a society by which our exertion and information will be united and systematized. Important advantages have been derived from similar institutions scattered throughout the country, and also from the establishment of a Library and Museum of the Arts and Sciences. It is hoped the subject will so recommend itself to the community, as to receive their immediate and cordial support."

Membership in the organization was obtained by election. Those desiring to join had to be recommended by two members in good standing. At the next regular monthly meeting following the recommendation, the candidates were voted in by a two-thirds vote of the qualified members present. The method of voting provided for secrecy. "All candidates proposed to be elected as new members, shall be voted for by white and black balls. The white balls are to be considered in favor of electing. The ballots shall be so placed that all members may cast their votes without other members being able to discover how they voted." After their election, members signed the constitution and paid a two-dollar initiation fee. The annual dues, however, were only one dollar after the first year.

Each member was entitled to take from the library two volumes at a time, for a period not

longer than one month. At a later date, members were allowed to take more than two books at a time by paying five cents rental on each additional book. After 1892, the name of the person checking out the largest number of books was recorded in the minutes. In that year, James Mallory borrowed thirty-nine books. In 1897, Ella Goldsmith had a record of forty books, and in 1902 Mrs. Ada Ford checked out forty-eight.

That the organization conducted its business affairs in a capable manner is proved by the copious notes of the secretaries. Each year auditors were appointed "to examine the Treasurer's, Secretary's, Librarian's, and all other accounts." Furthermore, bonds were required of the secretary, treasurer, and librarian.

The anniversary of the Institute and the election of officers was on the first Saturday in January of each succeeding year. At this annual meeting, the committees were appointed. An important one was the historical and biographical record committee, whose duty it was "to keep a record of remarkable events to be preserved in the archives of the Institute." They were also to obtain "relics, pictures, documents, and family records, and traditions calculated to throw light upon the History of Henry County, and incidentally of other parts of the country." Finally they were to

"prepare biographical records of deceased members of the Institute and of remarkable men and women of the county, to be read from time to time at the meetings of the Institute."

The five managers were responsible for all property of the Institute, monies and books excepted. They had the liberty to grant the free use of the hall of the Institute for "free lectures upon Science, Art, Literature and education", and to rent the hall for other purposes.

The Institute met regularly on the first Saturday of each month. The time of meeting was usually at two or three o'clock in the afternoon. Sometimes the meetings were held later in the day. In the December, 1870, meeting it was decided to adjourn "till the Second day of January, 1871, at early candle lighting."

These sessions were not taken up entirely by business matters, for at times topics for conversation were assigned. On April 3, 1875, "Mrs. McCray moved that the Institute take 'Charles Dickens' as a topic for conversation at the next meeting." The motion carried. In August, 1877, "On motion of Mrs. Turney, 'Novel Reading' was chosen as a topic for conversation at the next meeting and F. McCray was appointed to lead the conversation."

There was some controversy as to whether

those participating in these discussions should address the chairman, and it was finally decided that all taking part must be recognized by the chair. There were times when warm arguments occurred, but the spirit of controversy was avoided in the fields of politics and religion, for "party politics and party religion" were to be especially avoided.

When the Institute was organized in 1869, there were twenty-four members. The number gradually increased until there were seventy-nine names on the membership book for 1873. In 1885 the number had dropped to thirty-seven, in 1895 to twenty-seven, but in 1905 it was up to thirty. There were only three members paying dues in 1936. During the last few years no librarian has been hired, and, consequently, the library books are not in circulation. But the remaining members still keep up the records of the Institute, pay insurance on the building, and rent it to organizations wishing to use its halls.

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