

Comment by the Editor

HISTORICAL DUTIES

If history is more than an accumulation of information for the satisfaction of antiquarians, it must be associated with the time being. Knowledge of the past has little intrinsic value. Really, history is a kind of intellectual currency that can be exchanged for the goods of reasoned judgment to satisfy present needs. Ransacking the musty, haphazard, and partial records of obscure kings and common folks may be fascinating research but until the findings have been interpreted in the light of modern times they contribute nothing to the general welfare. To apply previous experience to the solution of present problems is not only the duty of historians but the measure of their social worth.

While contemporary opinion of the relative importance of current events may be distorted and unreliable, the viewpoint of the present nevertheless affords perspective for the contemplation of both the past and the future. As the years recede the pattern of history becomes more distinct and the figures in the tapestry of time assume their proper significance. It is equally apparent that

the direction of future affairs is determined by the exigencies of the present moment and the effect of experience. Fortunately each generation has a sense of place in the march of time. The humble pioneers realized that the sum of their striving was epoch-making. And so, almost instinctively, people are inclined to preserve the evidence of their way of life.

The living have an obligation to interpret their own conduct for the benefit of their successors. This involves not only the preservation of documentary material but the analysis and dissemination of information pertaining to contemporary aims. In times of crisis the function of the historian is complex and unusually important. The duty to be history-conscious is then all the more imperative, and so the organization of historical associations is encouraged and historical activities are expanded.

It is the purpose of the State Historical Society of Iowa to fulfill all the duties of collecting and preserving historical materials, of searching the older records for experience with which to illuminate the dark recesses of present quandaries, of interpreting the events of today which tomorrow will be history, and of publishing the works of scholars so that the accumulated wisdom of the past may be widely known and utilized.

While the country is at war interest is naturally centered upon the resulting conditions. That the military history of Iowa may be more accessible and better understood a volume on that subject will be published this year. Materials on all phases of the present war efforts are being collected in the library of the Society at Iowa City. Thousands of items clipped from the newspapers of the State are being sorted and filed so that a detailed record of activities in every community will be available. Timely stories, like the reaction of Iowans to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, will be printed in the PALIMPSEST, and contributions to the history of war times will appear in the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*. It is hoped that the knowledge of former achievements will fortify the determination to maintain our ideals in this crisis.

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