

# A SURVEY OF COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETIES IN PENNSYLVANIA

Few problems cause more concern among county historical society officers than those of finance, and particularly, the matter of sufficient income. This is not surprising in view of the emphasis placed on the virtue of the fatted treasury. A more obscure aspect of obtaining adequate funds to operate a historical society or any other **volunteer cultural** activity is the frequent failure of usually generous persons to support such a cause. Although historical societies do not relieve suffering, cure diseases, patch broken homes or lead troubled souls unto the paths of righteousness and bliss, they do preserve and nourish the moral and intellectual tradition of our civilization remarkably well. County historical societies simply haven't got an emotive corkscrew for drawing out funds from the public; they must depend on the rare bequest, on devoted members and friends, and on appropriations from local governing bodies.

Finance, unfortunately, is stressed too frequently out of proportion to other problems a historical society ought to have, such as quality of research and publications, effective educational techniques, service to school history classes, and coordinating the functions of historical groups and places throughout the county.

It is not the purpose of this survey, however, to consider the effectiveness of county historical societies in fulfilling their real objectives. Each society knows its reasons for existence, and each probably has more than a suspicion how well it is meeting those goals. This survey has but one basic purpose: to show members of the Lancaster County Historical Society how its sources of income, number of members, dues charged, and type of publication compare with similar societies. Of course, other societies which receive this survey may find the data interesting.

Questionnaires were sent to every county historical society in Pennsylvania with the exception of those societies which serve only a portion of a county or which serve more than one county. Pittsburgh and Philadelphia were excluded from this study. Each society was promised that their replies would be published but that no society other than the Lancaster County Historical Society would be identified by name despite the public nature of the facts requested. We are extremely grateful for the prompt and informative replies received from officers of sister societies. Fifty questionnaires were sent, and only twelve societies did not avail themselves of the opportunity to reply, using the self-addressed, stamped envelopes provided. We are quite pleased that 76% of the societies did respond, and we understand that some of the groups which did not reply are virtually non-existent.

JACK W. WILLSON LOOSE  
*Secretary*

## NUMBER OF MEMBERS

Of the first twelve societies having the largest numbers of members, nine societies are located in urban or heavily-populated rural counties of southeastern Pennsylvania. The society claiming the greatest number of members is situated in a sparsely populated rural county containing a few boroughs and no institutions of higher learning. This county has only a fifth of the population Lancaster County boasts. Our study would tend to show the "older" counties of eastern Pennsylvania—those which participated as entities in the pre-Revolutionary War activities of our Commonwealth—generally have more people who are members of historical societies. Many of these counties are within the cultural penumbra of Philadelphia. As to the character of the membership of the typical county historical society, it would seem (1) that younger people are not attracted generally to historical societies, and (2) that many members pay dues simply to support what they believe to be a worthwhile activity despite their personal disinterest in historical activities. The latter condition is not undesirable at all; it is a tribute to the liberality and unselfishness of citizens of the community. How to attract more younger adults is a perennial question, and the most substantial answer is simply to allow nature to take "its course" which thus far has managed to supply a sufficient number of replacements for aging members. A historical society cannot afford to be too unconcerned over its younger members, however, for we are approaching a century in which the traditions of our Western Civilization are to be locked in death struggle, the result of which can be anarchy, totalitarianism or comprehensive socialism — none a respecter of heritage and intellectual-moral tradition. It is extremely important that the next two or three generations contain more leaders whose historical backgrounds extend from their local historical societies to a thorough knowledge of the humanities. Historical societies ought to practice relentless aggression on the young people; they will thank us later. We cannot hold off the barbarians by wailing and wringing hands, or dreaming of the "good old days," or burying our heads in the sand, ostrich-like, to await eternity; we must arm ourselves now with scores of devoted young members. The current interest in historical societies and historic restorations is in step with other elements of a cultural trend. The future direction of this trend will be determined not by the quantity of scrolars disgorged from institutions of advanced schooling, but by the calibre of liberal scholars who will submit earnestly to an intellectual discipline. The latter group probably can be counted on for research by alert historical societies.

## DUES

Nearly every historical society offers a range of dues, from junior and associate memberships to life and corporate memberships. The most popular type of membership, however, is the "active" membership which allows the member full privileges at the lowest cost to him. All fees shown under the column "dues" in Chart I are for active membership. The increasing "cost of living" apparently has failed to daunt the average historical society which still clings to Pre-World War I dues. Few organizations exist which stubbornly hold the line against increases in dues as do the historical societies. Whether it is the feeling that shallow, ineffectual service deserves low dues, or that most members cannot afford to pay

CHART 1 SOCIETIES ARRANGED IN ORDER OF NUMBER OF MEMBERS

Code No.	No. of Members	Dues	Publication	Appropriations County	Received City	School Dist.	Approx. Income From Investments*
1	1006	2.00	Quarterly	350.			
2	975	3.00	none	2000.			\$ 2,100.
3	900	5.00	Quarterly	2000.	1000.	1000.	
4	800	3.00	none	1750.	1500.	1500.	
5	700	2.00	Irregular	500.			\$18,000.
6	660	4.00	Semi-annual	2000.			\$ 2,000.
7	640	2.00	Biennial	1000.	1000.		
LANCASTER	600	5.00	Quarterly	700.	100.	100.	\$ 2,000.
9	500	1.00	none	500.			
10	425	2.00	none	1800			\$ 5,000.
11	400	3.00	Annual	600.	300.	1000.	\$ 2,300.
12	400	2.00	Quarterly	2000.			
13	375	3.00	Irregular	1000.			
14	350	2.00	Annual	1000.			
15	315	2.00	none	1200.			
16	314	2.00	Annual	50.			
17	300	1.00	Ternary	Housing			
18	300	1.00	none	1000.			\$ 2,000.
19	300	5.00	Bi-monthly		350.		\$13,000.
20	280	1.00	Quarterly	1000.			
21	256	2.00	Annual	2000.			
22	225	1.00	Quarterly	1000.	300.		\$ 800.
23	200	2.00	Annual	320.			
24	200	2.00	none	1500.			
25	200	1.00	none	1200.			
26	200	1.00	Irregular	300.	Housing		
27	175	2.00	Annual	500.			
28	150	2.00	none				
29	150	1.00	none				
30	148	1.00	none	300.			
31	133	1.00	none	750.	500.		
32	130	2.00	Annual	143.			
33	125	.25	none				
34	100	2.00	none	Housing			
35	100	2.00	Irregular	1000.	200.	900.	
36	75	1.00	Irregular				
37	64	2.00	none	250.			
38	(defunct)						

\*Approximate income annually from investments must not be relied on too heavily because questionnaire failed to state clearly the information desired. Figures presented herein may be considered as "conservative" in all instances.

higher fees, we cannot determine. We are amazed that so many societies charge one dollar for annual dues, and still qualify for county appropriations; it is our understanding that societies must charge a minimum of two dollars to obtain county appropriations. Lancaster County Historical Society took a bold step in 1957 when it raised its dues from three dollars to five dollars, thereby becoming the third county society in the Commonwealth to charge five dollars. Only four or five members resigned as a result. A prevalent feeling exists to the effect that a more realistic price for dues indicates a more valuable and worthwhile association -- cheapness is not a virtue per se. From the chart it will be seen that two dollars is the favorite fee for dues.

## PUBLICATIONS

Next to talking, writing seems to be the chief activity of historical societies, and that much of the writing eventually turns up in print is for the good of posterity. County historical society publications fall into three main categories:

1. *Large publications, sometimes bound, issued annually or every two or three years.*
2. *Quarterly journals or magazines designed to be bound as a volume.*
3. *Bulletins, leaflets or newsletters.*

We might say also that some publications are quite scholarly and are filled with worthwhile research articles, whilst others are designed to popularize history for the general reader. The editor ought to know what he is attempting to achieve, and the type of readers he is trying to reach.

Our survey shows that practically all of the publications are letterpress printed.

The Lancaster Society is now publishing its 61st volume of historical papers and research works. In 1957 the Society adopted the quarterly journal style of publication instead of printing five to eight papers at more or less irregular intervals throughout the year. Half of the dues are allocated to the publishing budget, which means that  $\frac{1}{2}$  of \$5 x 600 members equals \$1500 for printing four quarterly journals each year, which averages \$375 per quarter. Of course, this amount must include photo-engravings, envelopes, postage, and a considerable number of spare copies for new members, the occasional buyer, and those who wish to complete their volumes. The Society feels its publication is one of its chief offerings to its members, the community, and to historical research in general. All of its articles are contributed without charge by the authors who are compensated with a few complimentary copies. A liberal allowance is made for illustrations; if the author desires more illustrations than the allowance will cover he must pay for the additional cuts. Back numbers of the Journal are sold by the Society librarian and the proceeds are used to purchase books for the library. Some societies use their proceeds for a revolving fund for publishing additional books.

## APPROPRIATIONS

Some years ago an Act of the Pennsylvania Legislature enabled county commissioners and city governments to appropriate limited sums of money annually to the chief county historical society. Since this was a "may" act, and not a

"must" act, whether or not the county and city officials make this appropriation is a matter of their choice.

**County:** County Commissioners were permitted to appropriate up to \$2000 annually to the chief historical society in their respective counties as of the date of our survey. In the meantime the Legislature approved a bill which raised the maximum to \$3000. It may be presumed that some counties will increase their appropriations accordingly. The county and city governments, as local governments, are looked to by their citizens for exercising reasonable economy. The local officials usually feel the wrath of local populations more intensely and more rapidly than state and national officials who take similar or even more drastic actions. The type and extent of economy expected by the majority of the taxpayers generally determines the reaction of county and city officials in the matter of appropriations. For that reason many county commissioners are reluctant to appropriate funds to libraries, historical societies and other cultural activities in which a limited number of persons are by heredity and rearing inclined to participate. Obviously the need for providing quarters and care for the destitute, the ill, and the law-breakers is demanded of the county officials. If all the organizations which request county funds were given what they ask for, no taxpayer would long endure the burden. The county historical society which feels it is being "slighted" by its county government would do better to take its problem to the people who can make their opinions and their willingness to pay additional taxes known to their commissioners. In a number of counties the local officials provide rooms, facilities, heat and power for their historical societies which cannot be measured in dollars, but which is of considerable value to the smaller societies. Without such aid, some societies could not exist. In addition to appropriations historical societies which own their properties usually receive exemptions on their real estate taxes. If the Lancaster County Historical Society was required to pay county and school taxes it would have to pay nearly \$1000 annually, based on its new assessment. The exemption granted by the township in which the Willson Memorial Building is located can be thought of as a contribution, although similar exemptions permitted churches cannot be considered as "aid" if our traditional barrier between church and state is to remain unchallenged.

**City and School Districts:** In counties where an urban center or city profits culturally from the county historical society appropriations from the city government are made occasionally, and, in a few instances, the city contributes a greater sum than the county. On Chart 1, the society coded 19 receives nothing from the county, whilst the major city therein appropriates the sum of \$350 annually. This situation is due less to any political struggle between city and county than to a handsome income derived from an endowment! Urban centers generally are more appreciative of the cultural potentialities of a historical society than a strictly rural population. The failure of many cities to support historical societies seems to arise from the objectives of such societies to be county-wide in scope. Another powerful reason may be the co-support of city and school districts. Our survey shows that of the nine societies receiving city appropriations, four of them also receive funds from the urban school district, and one (Lancaster) receives an appropriation from an outside township (Manheim Township) school district

but no funds from the city school district. Of interest is the fact that all school districts giving support are located in counties where the urban center also aids the historical society. This would indicate that the societies have been active in seeking appropriations unless the other societies had the pleasant experience of the Lancaster society which was the unsolicited support of the township school district. Inasmuch as the historical society is, or should be, an extension of the regular history classes in schools; school districts should feel that support is fully justified. Historical societies ordinarily must show school directors that their financial aid is warranted and one effective method of accomplishing this is to show the school officials how many students and teachers use the facilities of the historical society.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Occasionally one hears historical society people making comments on "what **could** be done if sufficient money was available." Practical men of business and government are more favorably impressed by "what has been done with the funds available" than a visionary's lament. Historical societies which manage their finances and activities efficiently, effectively and economically are always in an excellent position for making reasonable requests to their local governments. It is a shortsighted official, indeed, who does not recognize the immense value of a well-ordered historical society. Unfortunately, a few historical societies cannot be recognized as well-ordered. Our survey does not indicate political considerations enter into the matter of appropriations, which is as it should be.

## ACTS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATURE AFFECTING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

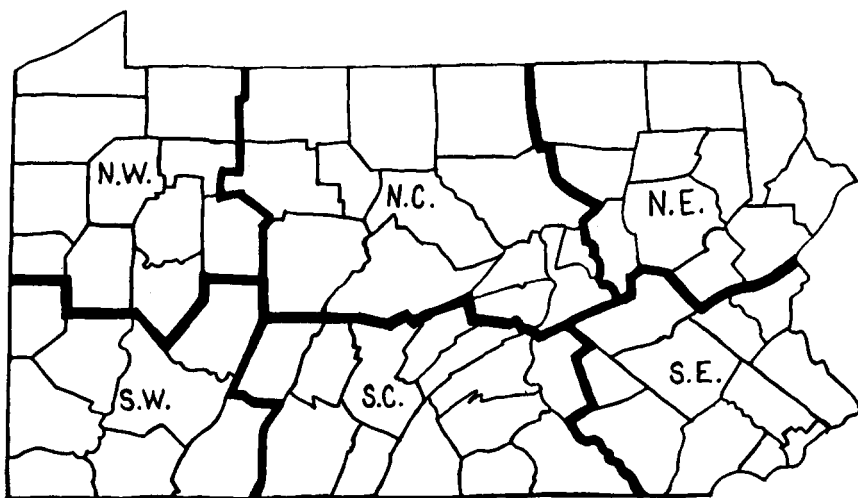
From time to time the state legislature passes laws designed to aid county historical societies. The first class counties (none of which have been considered in this survey) have fairly elaborate legislation operating to encourage their historical societies. The most recent County Code (1955, August 9, P.L. 323) permits (Section 1928) counties, independently or in connection with any other municipality or society, to appropriate funds for compilation of county war histories or any general history or historical account related to the records and government of the county, and for the publication and distribution of the same. Section 1929 permits counties to appropriate up to \$2000 to the oldest county historical society within its boundaries, but a more recent Act of the 1957 Legislature raised the sum to \$3000. Section 1930 stipulates that for county historical societies to receive the county appropriation the society must be properly incorporated, must have been organized for at least two years, must have a museum for relics, must have at least two public meetings annually, and must have at least 100 members who pay dues of not less than \$2 annually. Cities have been permitted to appropriate funds to county historical societies (1915, March 31, P.L. 36, #19, Section 1) (1919, July 12, P.L. 923, Section 1) but this applies to first, second and third class cities. Certain parts of these Acts probably have been repealed, especially concerning qualifications.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF COUNTIES

## CHART 2 ARRANGED BY CATEGORIES OF COUNTY APPROPRIATIONS

Category of County Appropriations	Percentage of Urban Population	County Political Administration	County Tax (1956) * Millage
\$2000	58%	Democrat	9½
\$2000	38%	Republican	3
\$2000	60%	Republican	5
\$2000	70%	Republican	5¾
\$2000	50%	Republican	7½
\$1800	87%	Democrat	9¾
\$1750	42%	Democrat	11
\$1500	46%	Democrat	11
\$1200	70%	Democrat	5
\$1200	12%	Democrat	9
\$1000	72%	Republican	7
\$1000	58%	Republican	10½
\$1000	70%	Republican	7½
\$1000	48%	Republican	7
\$1000	68%	Republican	7
\$1000	55%	Mixed	5
\$1000	35%	Republican	10
\$ 750	35%	Republican	5
\$ 700 (Lancaster)	43%	Republican	1
\$ 600	64%	Republican	7
\$ 500	20%	Mixed	7
\$ 500	40%	Democrat	10
\$ 500	19%	Republican	7
\$ 350	31%	Republican	6½
\$ 320	55%	Republican	14
\$ 300	39%	Democrat	11
\$ 300	30%	Republican	5½
\$ 250	41%	Republican	11
\$ 143	15%	Republican	9
\$ 50	18%	Republican	10
\$ 0	75%	Republican	9.7
\$ 0	12%	Mixed	7
\$ 0		Republican	10
\$ 0	52%	Republican	8¾
\$ 0	19%	Republican	8
Housing	25%	Mixed	
Housing	28%	Republican	7

\*County Real Estate and Occupation Tax does not include institutional district levy.



Division of state into six geographical sections for study of county appropriations to their respective historical societies. See chart 3.

CHART 3

Category of County Appropriations	Pct. of Recipient Societies	Geographical Distribution							
		NE		SE		NC	SC	NW	SW
\$2000	13½ %			100	%				
\$1200 to \$1800	13½ %	40	%	20	%		20 %		20%
\$1000	19 %			28½	%		28½ %	43	%
\$500 to \$750	16 %	33 1/3%		33 1/3%			16 2/3%	16 2/3%	
\$50 to \$350	19 %	28½	%			43%	28½ %		
Housing Provided	5½ %						50 %		50%
\$0	13½ %	20	%			40%	20 %	20	%
Percentage of counties surveyed reporting									
		87 ½ %		100	%	50%	80 %	85¾ %	40%
Number surveyed									
		8		10		10	10	7	5
Number reporting, including 1 defunct society									
		7		10		5	8	6	2





# DEDICATION OF THE WILLSON MEMORIAL BUILDING

(Home of the Lancaster County Historical Society)

June 2, 1957 — 2:30 P.M.

## P R O G R A M

Dr. Arthur P. Mylin, 1st Vice President, presiding

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

HAROLD W. SHAAR

INVOCATION

RABBI SAMSON A. SHAIN  
*Temple Shaarai Shomayim*

PRESENTATION OF THE BUILDING  
TO THE TRUSTEES

W. R. HARER  
*William H. Lee Associates,  
Architects*

ACCEPTANCE OF THE BUILDING

THE ACT OF DEDICATION

HON. JOSEPH B. WISSLER  
*Chairman, Board of Trustees  
Mary W. Rettew Estate*

PRESENTATION OF THE KEYS  
TO THE LANCASTER COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HON. JOSEPH B. WISSLER

ACCEPTANCE FOR THE SOCIETY

GEORGE L. HEIGES  
*President*

## THE DEDICATORY PRAYER

THE REV. ROBERT C. BATCHELDER  
*Rector, St. James' Episcopal Church*

O God, who as ruler of the Universe, art above all days and nights, we thy servants, who are prisoners of space and time, come before Thee with gratitude in our hearts for the rich heritage that is ours in this nation and community. For the men and women who have gone before us, and left us the gifts of their labor well done, and enriched our generation with faith in Thy guidance, we give Thee thanks. For the men of courage who founded the Lancaster County Historical Society; for its generous benefactors who have sustained and enriched it by gifts; for the planners of this building who with imagination had a vision of things that might be, and the workmen who gave their vision substance, we here express our gratitude to Thee, the author of every good and perfect gift. Grant that we in our day may preserve for generations to come the treasures Thou hast given us. We dedicate to Thy glory, the welfare of all, and to the preservation of truth, this building and its partial evidence of man as a pilgrim on the earth. May it be to our children's children a treasure house of the pageant of passing days, and an evidence of blessings enjoyed through Thy bounty. Teach us ever to serve Thee as Thou deservest — to give and not to count the cost — and to Thee be the glory and the praise for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

## SELECTIONS

BAND

## DEDICATORY ADDRESS

FRANK W. MELVIN, ESQ.  
*Chairman, Pennsylvania Historical  
and Museum Commission*

(Colonel Melvin, prominent attorney of Philadelphia, and member of numerous patriotic and historical societies in many of which he has held or is now holding chief offices, spoke on the "two most important buildings" in any county (excluding churches and schools) which are, he felt, the court house and the county historical society. The speaker elaborated on this theme, pointing out the relationship of the one institution to the other, and the peculiar role played by each in the acquiring, preserving and interpreting the records of human life and activity.)

## PRESENTATIONS

Slide and Film Strip Projector  
The National Colors

*From Samuel C. Slaymaker  
From the Sons of the Revolution  
By DANIEL RHODS*

## "THE STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER"

BAND

## GREETINGS

DR. S. K. STEVENS

*Executive Director  
Penna. Historical and Museum  
Commission*

DONALD A. GALLAGER, ESQ.

*President  
Penna. Federation of Historical  
Societies*

HON. KENDIG C. BARE

*Mayor, City of Lancaster*

HON. CHARLES H. PEARCE

*Commissioner, Lancaster County*

DR. HERBERT H. BECK

*President Emeritus  
Lancaster County Historical Society*

"AMERICA, THE BEAUTIFUL"

*BAND AND AUDIENCE  
Led by Harold W. Shaar*

BENEDICTION

*THE REV. ROBERT C. GRIBBIN  
Principal, Lancaster Catholic  
High School*

## OPEN HOUSE OF THE WILLSON MEMORIAL BUILDING

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Band, led by Ira D. Fickes, Jr. ....	Courtesy of Local 204, American Federation of Musicians
Sound Amplification and Tape Recording .....	Robert W. Zink
Chairs .....	C. Abram Snyder Funeral Home
Aides .....	Troop 11, Boy Scouts, Henry W. Fischer, Scoutmaster
Floral Tributes .....	Remington Rand, Inc., Charles Harris, Representative Ray Klump, Inc., Contractor Historical Society of York County
Floral Arrangements .....	Women's Garden Club
Mrs. Elmer Hansell	Mrs. D. J. Keener
Mrs. Dudley T. Lyall	Mrs. John B. Norton
Mrs. J. Laurence Strickler	Mrs. Louis J. Vandergrift

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M. Luther Heisey

Joseph B. Raum

W. W. Heidelbaugh

Mrs. Charles Y. Tanger

George L. Heiges, ex officio

\*deceased

After reading page 123 the reader will note that the Lancaster County Historical Society's income is derived chiefly from three sources:

Membership dues ..... 50%

Investment earnings ..... 35%

Appropriations ..... 15%

To obtain an additional \$1000 of annual income, the Society must (1) secure 200 more members, or (2) increase its endowment fund by approximately \$25,000, or (3) receive more than doubled appropriations from county, city and school districts. As a voluntary, member-controlled, self-supporting learned society, the doubled appropriations would be the least desirable source, **even if such a request would be granted.** The Society fully earns its present appropriations by serving the schools, tourists and visitors to the county, local businessmen, and new industry. But the positive, enlightened American tradition looks to private efforts and private contributions to sustain a healthy, free organization. Have you begun to obtain new members? Have you contributed to the Endowment Fund? The list of contributors on record as of September 13, 1957, will be published in the October issue of the JOURNAL.

The Editor