

# What Should Legislature Do For Historical Society?

What will the legislature of 1909 do for the State Historical society?

The legislatures of Wisconsin have been so liberal to such a society in that state that it has been a potent factor in unraveling the tale of western history. Its volumes, published under the direction of its secretary, Reuben Gold Thwaites, now grace the shelves of all important American libraries.

In Oregon, in Washington, in Colorado, in Kansas, in Missouri, historical societies perform a function of decided value to the civilization of those communities. Often the documents they preserve are of keener interest to Utah than to the archives in which they rest. One such, for instance, is a full report of an expedition undertaken to Great Salt Lake in 1826 by William H. Ashley, giving details of the trip both going and coming.

In Washington state the occasion of the Seattle fair is being taken advantage of to gather together every item that can enrich the story of western expansion. Wherein is the fault that Utah has no decided activity in this work to see that her story is properly presented? Utah's Historical society is 10 years old and except for the activity of one citizen, Mr. Spencer Clawson, has lain dormant through that period, languishing for lack of state appropriation or private donation. Its work is here to do, but its equipment to do it has never been provided.

THE question of what to do in Utah to bring into being an active society, searching for documents belonging to the state's history, and preserving the relics that tell the story of pioneer transition into civilized, organized communities, is one that has stirred a small group of Utah's people for many years.

But the zone of its activity has never been broad enough to rally to its support means enough to give effective life to an organization. True it has been organized. Mr. Spencer Clawson has worked as an individual, unaided, and without even moral support often where it was most needed. He has alone been the Utah Historical society. It has carried a president, and a secretary and board of directors through all the 10 years since the date of its first organization in 1898, and once a year its annual meeting has been held. But that is all.

In five weeks—on Jan. 20, 1909—another annual meeting of this society will be held. It will have the duty before it of electing a successor to President Joseph T. Kingsbury, incumbent, and of continuing in office Jerrold Letcher, secretary, who has served through continuously since the date of its first organization.

"We can never do anything more than to keep alive," declared Secy. Jerrold Letcher, when asked what were the needs of the Historical society, and why it was not an active force in the community, "until some kind of a home is provided for us, and a working capital. President Kingsbury of the society was elected because it was thought that we would find fellowship in the university historical department, and would find a home there where our researches could center, and where our property could be stored as we gather it together."

## CRYING FOR A HOME.

The history of the Historical society is an interesting one, and forms one long chapter of a zealous voice crying alone in a wilderness of industrial activity for help and finding it not. The first move that was made was to try to find a home in the Salt Lake public library, but this was found to be impracticable. The library belonged to the city. The society was meant to belong to the state.

Then came the move to get into harmonious relationship with the university, but in splendid academic aloofness the university historical department goes its way through the ruins of Greek temples and Napoleonic splendors, while down in the valley below the institution, an effort for work in Utah history cries alone, just as a chemist within the same city does the state's scientific investigation, while the university maintains a big laboratory and a faculty of experts totally divorced from the problems of the people immediately at hand.

## NOT MUSEUM OF CURIOS.

Whether the Historical society will coalesce with the university during the coming year perhaps depends on the legislature, or upon President Kingsbury, or Prof. Roylance, head of the university historical department, or upon Jerrold Letcher and Spencer Clawson. Or perhaps on a combination of all of these forces in the community life.

The society's work will run to results in literature, and into museum specimens—not a museum of curiosities, but of exhibits showing proof of trial, and example of effort. Therefore its needs are a room in a library building, and space in a state museum. There are plans drawn for a big administration building at the university, which is to include a library wing at least. The Utah branch of the Archaeological Institute is calling for a state scientific museum to be a center for the prehistoric remains being gathered in San Juan county, which now find an honorable position in museums in every part of the country, save the state wherein they originated.

A suggestion of Mr. Letcher's is that when this building is completed, it be claimed to assist in the historical society and the scientific museum, of which the people seem in need, with this done, the primary problem of the historical society will be solved, and it will begin a career of usefulness, perhaps with a working secretary, under salary, who shall spend his time bringing together documents and getting them before the public in a series of books, such as other states are turning out as permanent contributions to contemporary civilization.

## WHAT COLORADO HAS DONE.

However, the aim of the society is, and has been, to secure from the legislature an appropriation for the purchase of a site and the erection of the building at some convenient place where the collection would be sought by native and foreigner alike for information.

It is thought by some that if located on the university grounds it would become part of a institution, and in a measure lose its identity as a distinct organization. It would ultimately gather under one roof all kindred societies of which there are quite a number.

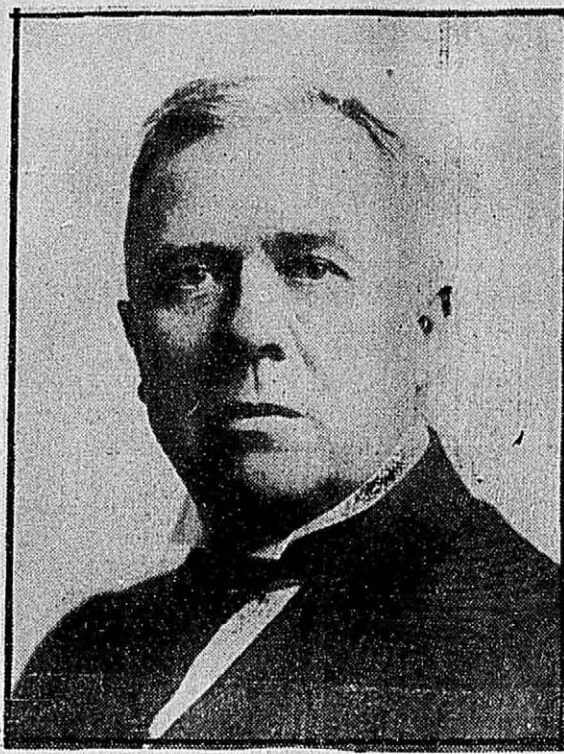
Such an institution is one of the features of Utah's neighbor, Colorado. The structure cost in the neighborhood of \$150,000, and is the pride of her citizens. This institution a few years ago purchased from Utah people a collection of cliff dwelling pottery, etc., that the Utah law makers declined to use. Mr. Clawson's quotation, "doth enrich them but makes us poor indeed."

## BIRTH OF SOCIETY.

The first stirring of organized interest in Utah history came with the preparations for the Pioneer Jubilee in 1897. In that year those who had been most interested held preliminary meetings and gradually the movement gathered strength enough for the assembling of a mass meeting, and the organizing of a society.

The immediate purpose then in view was to make the occasion of the Pioneer Jubilee more than a fleeting show, and to gather together those things connected with the celebration which should become its permanent contribution to history.

In April, 1897, Jerrold R. Letcher, imbued with these ideas, called upon Mr. Alfalfa Young, then editor of the Salt Lake Herald. To him he presented the case with the result that an article appeared in Mr. Young's paper on April 3, 1897, endorsing the move, and urging that the Jubilee commission take the necessary steps to perfect an organization. Other pa-



SPENCER CLAWSON.

pers fell into line, and on June 22, Mr. Letcher had support enough to warrant him in addressing a communication to the commission, again urging upon it its opportunity, and regretting its lack of interest.

This communication was referred to Gov. Heber M. Wells, with whom an interview followed with Mr. Letcher. The state was willing then to do nothing; for its resources were overtaxed, and the alternative of trying to force the society into life upon its own feet, was adopted.

## INITIAL MEETING.

A call to the citizens of all parts of the state was issued, designating Thursday, July 22, as the proper date to meet in a large mass meeting. This date was in Jubilee week, when the people from all parts of the state were here in festive mood.

At the hotel completion on the date mentioned, the Utah State Historical society came into existence. Gov. Wells called the meeting to order. Jerrold R. Letcher was made chairman, James T. Hammond, secretary, and addresses were made preceding the motion to incorporate, by Franklin D. Richards, Isabel Cameron Brown, H. D. Johnson, John Parry, Prof. Kingsbury, Dr. Ellen B. Ferguson, Heber J. Grant, John Q. Cannon, Gov. Heber M. Wells, and James X. Ferguson, all enthusiastically endorsing the proposition of moving at once for definite results.

Chairman Letcher's committee on permanent organization was named to consist of Heber J. Grant, C. S. Kinney, Isabel Cameron Brown, J. T. Kingsbury, J. T. Caine, Eurithe K. LaBarthe and Mathoniah Thomas.

It consumed a long period of time perfecting articles of incorporation

but these were finally filed Dec. 28, 1897.

As was to be expected from the showing up to that time, there was enthusiasm enough to guarantee a large and successful meeting in January, 1898. Under the provision of the articles of incorporation calling for annual meetings, that for 1898 was held in the Theosophical hall on West Temple street on Jan. 17, and was well attended.

## INTEREST LAPSES.

No permanent home for the organization had been secured, however, and no way had been found to keep interest alive beyond the limits of an active public sentiment. Therefore after the addresses had been delivered and committees appointed to confer with the Jubilee commission on the matter of relics pertaining to the pioneers, interest lapsed, never again to be seriously revived up to the present time.

At that meeting the speakers were Franklin D. Richards, President Kingsbury, and Dr. Ellen B. Ferguson. The only formal action taken, looking to new life, was the endorsement of a report of the committee on Jubilee, that it had secured many valuable relics to be held, pending action of the legislature as to their future disposition, and to hear the report of another committee to the effect that it understood the city library would make room for the association and its exhibit. Neither expectation ever came to anything.

## EXHIBITS STORED.

Meanwhile the goods and chattels collected have been stored in the basement of the City and County building, waiting the day of interest enough, expressed in the terms of finances, to

make a public exhibition possible. Papers and documents are stored by Jerrold Letcher in his private office in the Federal building. At the annual elections new officials have been selected, the presidents being respectively, Franklin D. Richards, John T. Caine, O. F. Whitney, and Joseph T. Kingsbury, who is at present holding office. Jerrold Letcher has continued as secretary, and Spencer Clawson has performed his long and unaltered service as chairman of the executive committee, and of the committee on library and museum. At each session of the legislature a bill has been introduced making a small appropriation for the association, and just as regularly the bill has been commended in house and senate, and given a final quietus "because of lack of funds."

What the coming session does depends on what public pressure is brought on the body to the end of finally bringing to Utah a live and aggressive Historical society.

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