

Research In State History in State Universities*

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It is not the purpose of this paper to describe the extent to which State Universities are carrying on research in State and local history, or what courses they may be offering to their students in this field of research and study. Information on that subject is being sought by a committee of the Mississippi Valley Historical Society, and when it is obtained it will be made available to the members of this organization. I shall speak rather of the duties, opportunities and responsibilities of the State University in this direction. In the brief time at my disposal I shall attempt only a categorical summary of observations, leaving to the discussion any elaboration that may be though fruitful.

1. The first obligation resting on a State University is that which rests on every university—it should be a university within the scope of its endeavor. As university men we all have the same aim. Whether in research or in teaching the purposes of a State University is the same as that of any other university—to advance learning, to promote culture, to discover truth and to give to men and women an opportunity, in touch with leaders and laboratories of learning, to know more of the arts and sciences of life. I do not see that research in State history is essentially any more the function of a State University than of any other university.

2. But a State is a people under some form of political organization, and every organized society, and more especially the State, owes something to its history. A State entirely indifferent to its history would be a sorry spectacle. Such a State is hardly known in the record of human life because, should a State sink to that low level or fail to attain above it, it would cease to have a history and would drop from view. Having lost all interest in its own ancestry it would cease to be of interest to its posterity. The State is under obligations for its own sake, not only to preserve its history, as found in its materials and memorials, its archives and documents, but to celebrate that history, to publish it and make it available to

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its students, its historians and its people. The State may, therefore, very properly endow and employ its university for the promotion of this end, within limits consistent with the privileges and duties of the university in all other directions. This obligation the State ought to recognize and fulfill. There is not a better, more efficient or more constant agency for this work of the State than the State University. It is the obvious medium in connection with its State Historical Society and its Historical Commission for the prosecution of this function of the State.

3. It is not to be deemed essential nor even important that the university should establish undergraduate courses in State history in its college of liberal arts. Arts are long and time is fleeting. Other things demand attention in a liberal arts education. Graduate courses would be more proper, but no one has a right to demand even these in a State University or in any other university. Such courses, it should be candidly recognized, may be of interest and benefit to but a small body of students. In a short university life most students will desire very properly to devote their time to other and more important lines of study. I say this with some appreciation of the fact that upon the question as to what knowledge is most worth while there will be sharp differences of opinion, and that there are those who will contend that it is most important for a student to know his own life, and that of his own people in his own State. I can only give my judgment for what it may be worth, and that judgment is that other things than State and local history are more likely to be conducive to a student's culture, to his training and to his higher education. We may properly appreciate our local history without contending that it is just as important for the training of our youth in history that they should know as well the battles of Pigeon Roost and Horse Shoe Bend as to know the significance of Marathon and Waterloo. Let us base our contention for local history on tenable ground.

4. The Department of History in a State University should be ready and willing, within the limits of its equipment, its powers and other duties, to lend its aid and co-operation to every agency in the State toward the promotion of a public interest in, and a knowledge of, the State's history; to an intelligent, public-spirited preservation of historical materials and towards making the content of this material available in published forms. State and local historical societies, teachers' associations, the public schools, etc., may

be sought by Departments of History in State Universities as fitting instruments for co-operation.

5. The State University should do more. It should sustain some agency to promote the collection and publication of such materials in State history. A special historical library, and librarian, scholarships and research fellowships in State history, lectureships, bulletins, magazines, a well organized and well directed Historical Survey—these are obvious connections and instrumentalities by which research in State history may be promoted. This would involve subsidy, support, a money maintenance of men who give all or much of their time to this work, whether they be on or off the teaching staff. These workers in State history at the State Universities, should be in closer co-operation with the State Libraries, the State Historical commissions and State Historical societies.

6. The work by such means should be in connection with and under the direction of the Department of History. There need be no separate department of State History except in the sense that here is a special field of research in which trained historical workers may serve the State. But a separate teaching department in the college of liberal arts is uncalled for. A student is not to be expected nor should he be allowed to choose such a local field as a major subject for graduation. The field may be a department of useful and fruitful labor worthy of additional laborers, to which State encouragement and subsidy may be given, but it does not call for a coordinate department of teaching and administration.

7. But research in State history offers a very fruitful field for the application and further training of advanced students in history. It offers a field from which, if the field be properly tilled, we may expect valuable contributions which will be of great assistance in the study of our national history as well as valued additions to our historical literature. It is now easy to be discerned that he who would study our national development must needs study the West, the frontier, the States that grew up here, the people that settled and builded these commonwealths, the motives and influences and *spirit that prompted these people*. He who would study our national politics and parties of a hundred years ago must study the States, the parties, the factions, the conditions, the political leaders in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Virginia and the Carolinas. The intelligent student sees clearly that the decisive influences moved from the States to the center. No one will understand what hap-

pened and why in national politics without a knowledge of State affairs and State life. Nothing is more obvious than this to the students of our history. Not only these students but intelligent men of affairs readily understand this. It is very forcibly illustrated for them as they look at current political history. Recent American history can not be indifferent to what Oregon has been doing in the field of politics. What is going on in the political life of Kansas, of New York, of Pennsylvania, of Wisconsin and of Illinois determines the course of American politics. From a knowledge of conditions in these and other States must the historian of America make up his account. Without the records from the States he cannot portray our national life in any serious or significant way. For his sources he will have to look to the documents preserved in the States, to monographs and contributions on local history which have been produced by laborious workers in the local field. As we know, much of this kind of work has already been done and certainly the State Universities should encourage more of it in every possible way. They have, or they can collect, the materials. They have, or they can train, the advanced students capable of doing the work. They can find fruitful themes for master's theses and doctoral dissertations with a view to productions, not merely of local or remote or antiquarian interests but of interest to our common history. I may be pardoned for naming a few such themes as have been used in Indiana, which may serve to suggest similar themes for use anywhere else: "The Whig Party in Indiana, in 1832 to 1852;" "The Greenback Party in Indiana;" "Party Politics in Indiana during the Civil War;" "Internal Improvements in Early Indiana;" "State Banking in Indiana, 1816-1860;" "Early Indiana Journalism;" the edition of the "Governors' Messages of Indiana." These are merely examples of the possibilities that are open.

It behooves the State to collect and preserve the materials of its history, not only for its own sake but for the sake of the country at large. The State's history will best be served by the trained historical student, by men and women who can live in library and university centers, apart from earning a livelihood, and who, if not themselves experts, may be apprenticed to experts in investigation and research. It is at this point and in this direction that the State University should lend its aid to State history by providing men who can oversee and direct capable students in the study of appropriate topics, and in arranging and editing local historical ma-

terial. There is abundant reason why the State University should cultivate this field. It is a rich field for historical study and production. The problem and expense of publication and preservation need not be assumed by the university alone. It may be undertaken in co-operation with other agencies of the State. Some State Historical Societies have direct State connection and support. Where they have not the State should be encouraged to establish a permanent historical commission which should perform for the State one of its most sacred duties—the collection, preservation and publication of the State's archives and documentary history. I mean, of course, not monographic productions nor any one's account of any movement or event, but the letters, correspondence, messages, documents and other materials from which the history of the State may be studied and written. To such a commission the State University, or any university or college within the State, should lend its consistent aid and co-operation. And the commission through State appropriations should aid the university by making available to the public the edited documents and such worthy monographs as the historical workers of the university may be able to produce.