History Teachers' Forum

HINTS ON HOBBIES FOR HIGH SCHOOL CLUBS

By LEONARD S. KENWORTHY

The window display in a nearby book store which the writer passes frequently is now featuring a series of pamphlets on hobbies, including one on *The Care and Feeding of Hobby Horses,* in which over two hundred pastimes ranging from local archaeology to backyard zoos are discussed. On first thought these leisure time activities may bear little relationship to the high school history department, but on further thought a very direct bearing should be seen. Hobbies are a comparatively new feature of the school program which fascinate a large group of students not otherwise reached. There is no reason why this interest cannot be transferred to the regular classroom work or incorporated in the history club activities.

In every community there are men and women whose spare time is spent in some useful hobby, who would be glad to share their enthusiasm and knowledge with high school students, if called in to the history club for an exhibit or talk. For example, there may be a man who has a collection of Indian arrow heads picked up on his own farm, there may be someone particularly interested in period furniture, or a coin collector with some valuable Confederate or greenback money.

No more interesting program could be arranged than one enjoyed recently by the writer when he heard a business man talk on the German paper money he had collected during the inflation period following the war. In his collection were bills printed by cities noted for the making of chamois, therefore chamois money; bills made by cities where silk was the chief industry, hence silk money; and bills made by cities where the Quakers were carrying on child feeding, and consequently called Quaker money. Such men are proud of their collections and usually eager to exhibit them.

Many students have already developed hobbies of their own but as yet have failed to realize all the values to be derived from them. Their value would be enhanced by showing the relationship they bear to their more formal studies, including history. No better example of this plan can be found than the popular pastime of stamp collecting. It is a hobby

that can help students in a tangible way, for "the history of our national postage is a history of the United States for the past century". The historical value of stamp collections has been covered in an extremely interesting manner by such books as K. B. Stiles, *Geography and Stamps;* A. F. Harlow, *Old Post Bags*: *The Story of the Sending of a Letter in Ancient and Modern Times;* S. I. Rothschild *Stamps of Many Lands.* The inexpensive Leisure League's booklet on *Stamp Collecting* may be procured by those interested.

There yet remains another group open to suggestions for developing new hobbies such as the collecting of historical advertisements. It is safe to assert that no magazine appears without some advertisement which harks back to some historical incident or fact. A recent double-page automobile advertisement discussed "The Evolution of the Automobile"; another carried a full page painting in color of the "Landing of Captain Cook at Botony Bay in 1770"; while the startling caption of an insurance company's effort at attractiveness read as follows: "Every policyholder owes a debt to Queen Elizabeth", which was followed by a discussion of the first charter to such a company. Perhaps the most startling and helpful historical advertisement to appear recently was a double-page picture in color representing progress in modes of travel throughout the world from ancient to modern times. So one might continue to list the material available for starting the fascinating and educational hobby of collecting historical advertisements.

There are no doubt a great many persons interested in local and state history because of some small piece of research done while high school or college students, which later developed into hobbies. According to the student's interests, the sponsor of a history club can often encourage the use of spare time in delving into local history or biography. Then too, the whole club can profitably devote several meetings to the study of famous Hoosiers, such as the biographies of Janet Scudder or W. M. Chase in art; the Wright brothers in aviation; Ida Husted Harper in the realm of women's rights; Abbott, Rives, or Bowers in history; William Vaughn Moody, Theodore Dreiser, George Ade or many others that might be mentioned in the field of literature.

This same biographical scheme may be extended to almost any field. One particularly interesting and profitable

field would be that of famous American immigrants as Angelo Patri, Louis Agassiz, Walter Damrosch, Michael Pupin, Edward Bok, Carl Schurz, John Muir, Alexander Bell or anyone of scores of others.

This approach to the study of history through the use of hobbies should be profitable in many ways. First of all it offers a new and variable approach to the field of history, thereby helping to eliminate the monotony of repetition in different years, especially in American history. In the second place it correlates history study with the activities program. Similarly it helps to correct the mistaken impression held by some students that history is not an integral part of the every day knowledge needed in understanding events around them. In the fourth place it develops a lasting interest in history by starting the student out on what may become a life-time hobby. Likewise, it may appeal to some group of students hard to reach, because they are interested in contemporary life rather than history. This sort of work shows them some direct relationships between the present and the past. It is to be hoped that teachers will more and more embrace the opportunity to use extra-curricular activities to increase the interest of their students in history.