

History Teacher's Forum

AN OPEN LETTER

By LORING C. HALBERSTADT

The high school teachers of history are on the firing line. Often, being engaged in their work of teaching the events of the past and present, they become absorbed in the processes of imparting these facts, and in those whom they are instructing. Little details come and go in their daily routine which seem insignificant. Like the soldier on the firing line, little bits of information which they come in contact with seem so insignificant that opportunities are passed. Yet the men back of the lines need this information, and the good soldier on the firing line today not only fights but becomes a collector of bits of information to be passed back to others with more time, experience, and broader views to look them over and to discover their real significance and put them to use in their proper places. So the history teachers in our Indiana High Schools are on history's firing line. They should be constantly looking for bits of rare information, as well as for facts which seemingly are insignificant but may become very important in a broader set-up.

As an illustration the writer will relate the story of two letters which came to his attention when he was a history teacher. Several years ago, after teaching a lesson in United States History, a boy stopped after class and said he had a letter at home that he would like for me to read. The next day before school started the letter was brought in and read. It was a description by an eye witness of Morgan's Raid in Ohio after Morgan had left Indiana soil.

A year or so later a girl informed me that her mother had discovered an old letter in a clock. I asked to see it. This letter was written by a missionary to the Wyandotte Indians here in Indiana. The letter described the writer's trials with the Indians as they were moved from Indiana to Missouri. A copy of this was sent to the Secretary of the Kansas Historical Society, and it brought a reply that this was a letter of real importance. Also that the Secretary was writing a biography of Mr. Wheeler and welcomed this find. Incidentally, the girl's parents discovered relatives in Missouri and visits have been exchanged since that time.

Perhaps there are other teachers of history in Indiana with better stories than the above. Let us hope so. I am also satisfied that there are others that have passed up "finds" when the gold ore was in their pans. The *Indiana Magazine of History* contains a department devoted to the publishing of documents. It can serve us and we can serve it. There should be a better tie-up between history teachers of Indiana and the Indiana Historical Society. This sentiment was expressed by a speaker at the October meeting.

As we travel "The trodden path" recognizing all of the old land marks, perhaps we should saunter a little and look more closely. A "find" may be just back of that "big decaying walnut stump." So come on History Teachers of Indiana, "let down the 'bars'—climb over" and let us use the work of the Indiana Historical Society and of the quarterly, the *Indiana Magazine of History*.