Kansas Historical Notes

Fred W. Brinkerhoff of Pittsburg, president of the Kansas State Historical Society, was honor guest at a meeting of the Crawford County Historical Society at Pittsburg June 7, 1944, and spoke briefly of the organization and work of the State Historical Society.

Dr. Ralph H. Smith, president of the Crawford county society, announced the following chairmen of committees for the work of the county society: Mrs. Lena Martin Smith, Pittsburg—Catalogue articles of historical interest and keep file of items or information gathered by various committees; Mrs. Clark M. Paris, Pittsburg—Keep a clipping record of historic events and file in archives; Frank Dorsey, Pittsburg—Secure rolls and rosters of service men and arrange for present selective service records when local boards are through with them; Dr. Elizabeth Cochran, Pittsburg—Letter collection; C. C. Wheeler, Pittsburg—Locate important genealogy in Crawford county and make record with location; Mrs. F. A. Gerken, Girard—List War Dads, Navy Mothers, D. A. R., American Legion and auxiliary and any other patriotic and historical group, and enlist their interest in building collection; Mrs. O. P. Dellinger, Pittsburg—Gather pioneer stories of county; George F. Beezley, Girard—Make record of historic buildings and sites in Crawford county; Ralph J. Shideler, Girard—Collect and record writing, painting, sculpture, design and music composition for creative artists’ “Who’s who”; H. A. Holzer, Pittsburg—Make list with brief sketch of each of the leaders in Crawford county for industrial and professional “Who’s who”; Mrs. Harry Price, Cherokee—Locate and list homes, furniture, costumes and collections of art and books of historical significance; J. E. Needham, Girard—Make sketches of pioneer churches and schools in the county, and R. E. Mangrum, Pittsburg—Civic war activities.

Gov. Andrew F. Schoeppel has announced the appointment of Harry C. Blaker and Donald F. Ellis of Pleasanton to the board of trustees of the Marais des Cygnes Massacre Memorial Park. Members reappointed were E. A. Hoag, Pleasanton, chairman; James Martin, of Boicourt, and Kirke Mechem, of Topeka.

Historical Societies in the United States and Canada is the title of a 261-page handbook edited by Christopher Crittenden and issued this summer by the American Association for State and Local His-

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tory of Washington, D. C. Names of the president and secretary of each society, the date of its organization, number on staff, membership, dues, total income, kind of collections, and the hours each is open, were printed. The booklet gave detailed information on twenty-four active historical societies in Kansas, and named twelve others for which there was insufficient record to list among the active organizations.


Dr. Malin’s well-documented book carries the raising of wheat in Kansas through its spring and soft winter eras to the 1900’s when several varieties of hard winter wheat, through constant development and improvement, were beginning to make Kansas the banner wheat state of the nation.

The introduction of hard winter wheat to the state was not in itself an event that gave cause for immediate rejoicing. Even after it was established here new varieties were necessary before Kansans could partially overcome major obstacles provided by insects, weather and milling. Dr. Malin has emphasized the part played by improved machinery, and particularly the adaptation of lister tillage, in the raising of wheat.

In years of extensive study of documents, letters and newspaper files Dr. Malin was unable to locate contemporaneous records which would fully substantiate the tradition that the Mennonites, in the middle 1870’s, were the first to introduce Turkey red hard winter wheat to Kansas. They brought winter wheat, he agrees, but there is a question that they were the first and only ones to introduce it. To him, “the strangest aspect of the whole situation is . . . the absence of any [contemporary] reference to Russian wheat during the first years of this [Mennonite] migration.” He recognizes, however, “that there must be a substantial volume of contemporary correspondence in the hands of Mennonite families that should
clarify the rôle of that sect in the introductions made by them,” but to date the beginnings remain clouded.

“According to recent Mennonite historians it was . . . [the Gnadenau, Marion county] colony of twenty-four families, of whom [Jacob A.] Wiebe was one, that is credited with the introduction of Turkey hard winter wheat, each family of whom had brought about a peck of it, planting it in the fall of 1874 and harvesting it in 1875.” However, in an autobiographical statement, Wiebe’s only reference to wheat preparations for the first fall of 1874 was to the purchase of some American seed for the first crop.

“If the Wiebe group brought a remarkable new wheat,” Malin continued, “and no other Mennonites did, he did not realize its significance. . . . In view of the extensiveness of the migration, it would seem more probable that many families brought wheat with them from Russia. Furthermore, it is probable that more than one variety or strain of Russian wheat was included in the impedimenta of these German Mennonites in their transit to America. . . .’’

In summing up the Mennonite contribution Dr. Malin believes it “falls largely into the category of the accidents of history and there is no evidence yet available to demonstrate that they understood even remotely at the time the significance of what they were doing, and it was years afterwards before they knew anything unusual had been done. Beyond the fact of bringing hard winter wheat from Russia, their positive contribution lies largely in the high quality of their farming and their shrewdness in adjusting successfully their traditional agricultural system to the new American crops, machinery and environment. The spread of the hard winter wheat throughout Kansas was almost entirely, if not altogether, a folk phenomenon, the common people following their instincts even against the advice of experts in agriculture and the discriminations of technicians of the milling and baking trades. . . .’’