

Public at the Creation: Place, Memory, and Historical Practice in the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, 1907–1950

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“Our Roots Flourished in the Valley,” stated former Organization of American Historians (OAH) executive secretary Thomas D. Clark in his 1978 memoir of the days when the OAH was the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (MVHA).¹ The MVHA did indeed incarnate the regional origins of what in 1965 became the OAH. From its founding in 1907, the association strove to represent “the Valley.” Though the exact boundaries of the fledgling group’s aspirations were vague and it welcomed work on the United States as a whole, its intellectual and organizational endeavors remained until the 1940s fixed largely on region and place. The story of those regional origins has been told many times, not only in Clark’s reminiscences but also in earlier reflections as the MVHA/OAH celebrated milestones on the way to its current centenarian status. As Clark understood, institutions both reflect and shape the aspirations of groups. By linking the MVHA to the historians who embodied the agenda and intellectual movements that gave it substance, one breathes life into a study of the institution. That understanding of the links between members, movements, and institution guides the following examination of how the MVHA’s structures and traditions facilitated intellectual endeavor, translating it into collective historical practice.

The common interpretation has highlighted the transformation of a small community of scholar-historians into a nationally oriented professional organization, sometimes reviewing the MVHA’s past with a touch of nostalgia but more often with relief at the escape from such “parochial” roots. In 1978 Ray Allen Billington wrote humorously of the “bad old days.” In 1940 William B. Hesseltine claimed that the MVHA had “outgrown its regional beginnings” and that its name had only “antiquarian significance.” John W. Caughey stressed the “glacial-like” conservatism of the MVHA’s journal and the “lapses into provincialism” as well as a “local history–society ancestry” from which he wished to distance the association in the 1950s. Whether the association had been born provincial was disputable, but the argument remained that its heritage was regional and historians contrasted that heritage with a broader national view.²

Editorial Note: On the centennial of the Organization of American Historians, Ian Tyrrell reflects on its regional origins and the public mission they fostered.

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¹ Thomas D. Clark, “Our Roots Flourished in the Valley,” *Journal of American History*, 65 (June 1978), 85–107.

² Ray Allen Billington, “From Association to Organization: The OAH in the Bad Old Days,” *ibid.*, 75–84; Wil-

Retrospectives stressing the triumph of nationally oriented professional historians over parochial amateurs obscure both how blurred the lines between the two categories were and how crucial engagement over the representation of space was in allowing the association to foster research of public significance. A cluster of research activities within the MVHA focused on the spatial and institutional connections of the region. Though commonly depicted as parochial, the early ambitions of its leaders were not. Most of all, their approach allowed interaction with public audiences because it focused on the valley and the American West where, in the constituent states, academics could learn from and reach nonacademics more readily than in a more rarefied national group. Being a “professional” or “academic” historian did not mean aloofness from public audiences, nor was the MVHA a purely “learned society.” “Professors” did not constitute “a majority of the membership” in 1915—or even as late as 1922, though by then they had become more prominent in the executive.³ In the early MVHA academic historians cooperated with public historical agencies, whose leaders had vital roles in the association. That cooperation established enduring traditions, even though it was academics who increasingly directed the intellectual agenda. The MVHA labored in what is now called public history, supporting the marking of historical sites, publicizing historical museums, and promoting preservation of natural landscapes and the built environment. Association members displayed an attachment to place that allowed the MVHA to support innovative work on the material aspects of life in the region, including conservation of natural resources. The MVHA thereby contributed to the development of an early form of environmental history, although that term was unknown. Because the organization focused on region rather than nation, the MVHA strove initially to include transnational connections that sprang from the West’s long-term economic ties to the wider world. The decline of those traditions was not a simple progression from regional antiquarianism to professional and cosmopolitan sophistication. The shifts were complicated, uneven, and protracted because the revival of regionalism during the Great Depression perpetuated the relevance of the MVHA’s public history portfolio and because the MVHA’s institutional practices already cultivated a sense of regional identity.

It is important not to romanticize this heritage. African American historians played virtually no part in the early association. Its color-bound conventions met in segregated facilities whenever in the South until 1951, and black historians such as John Hope Franklin were absent from the programs until that time and largely absent from citation in the association’s publications. Moreover, women played subordinate parts in the MVHA’s formal academic programs, and the group’s cohesive traditions could be oppressive

liam B. Hesseltine, “The Thirty-third Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 27 (Sept. 1940), 243–63, esp. 244; John W. Caughey, “Under Our Strange Device: A Review of the ‘Review,’” *ibid.*, 44 (Dec. 1957), 519–35, esp. 533. For other accounts of Mississippi Valley Historical Association (MVHA) history, see James L. Sellers, “Before We Were Members—The MVHA,” *ibid.*, 40 (June 1953), 3–24; William D. Aeschbacher, “The Mississippi Valley Historical Association, 1907–1965,” *Journal of American History*, 54 (Sept. 1967), 339–53; Theodore C. Blegen, “The Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 19 (Sept. 1932), 243–60; and Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York, 1988), 182–83.

³ John R. Wunder, “The Founding Years of the OAH,” *OAH Newsletter*, 34 (Nov. 2006), 8; Aeschbacher, “Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 341. Only about one-sixth of the total membership, including institutions, was composed of academics; individuals other than academics accounted for nearly three times the academic membership in 1922, a position unchanged from 1912. See 1912 and 1922 Membership Lists, box 8, Organization of American Historians Records, 1906–2003 (Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis Library, Indianapolis).

to younger members who sought a more urban (and urbane) orientation. Nor would it be correct to draw a straight line from the early concerns for conservation and public history to recent understandings of those issues. Yet the history of the association and of its survival testifies to the possibilities of regional vision and cooperation and provides evidence of the fine line separating academic history from wider practices of public memory.

This story is not simply one of place, but of the way memory is contested and developed by social groups—of the politics and practice of historical memory. Of late, historians have conventionally seen history and memory as opposed. “History is the enemy of memory,” stated Richard White in a succinct articulation of the common perception. Peter Novick also drew a strong distinction between the two. “Historical consciousness, by its nature, focuses on the *historicity* of events. . . . Memory, by contrast, has no sense of the passage of time” and insists on seeing the past eternally in the present, expressing some deeper or “essential truth.” Those assessments have much substance to them. Nevertheless, the MVHA’s focus on place shows how the politics of memory linked academics and nonacademic historians. “Historical memory” is a category of some importance, Ellen Fitzpatrick has insisted. For a century “forces of professional concern and investment . . . shaped the writing of American history” and “influenced the ways in which intellectual preoccupations have been forgotten or remembered.”⁴ Historians’ faded memories of the early MVHA are part of this selectiveness. But historical memory surely goes beyond this. How historians of “the Valley” incorporated popular memory must be considered. The MVHA’s practice shows how historians drew on the developing sense of public historical memory to provide sustenance for academic work. The early engagement with place gave important figures in the association opportunities to tap both a public sense of regional memory and their own. The growth of the MVHA shows how professional historians came to represent the valley as a place from which they had sprung or to which they had formed an attachment and from which they derived inspiration. The MVHA was intellectually stronger because of, not in spite of, a grounding in region and its senses of place and memory.

The historian David Glassberg called attention to the issue of place in American life and reminded us that a “sense of place” is “no more a natural product” than a sense of history. As the Australian scholar Rosslyn Haynes stated, “Place is space that has meaning and hence identity. It is a site of collective memory that we can access and sometimes retrieve from other people’s memories.” To attain the significance that Haynes ascribed to it, the Australian historian Katie Holmes wrote, “a place needed to be actively engaged with, [and] a sense of belonging established.” The MVHA encouraged such engagement because it provided an institutional structure in which members could pursue a coherent research program. The structure rested on the association’s conferences, including the extensive opportunities for socializing built into them, and its networks, journal, and proceedings. According to many accounts of late twentieth-century historiography, “our own professional education inculcates an indifference to place,” but that was less true for MVHA members in the early twentieth century, precisely because the valley and the institutionalized study of it became intertwined through memory, tradition, and historical practice.⁵

⁴ Richard White, *Remembering Abanagran: Storytelling in a Family’s Past* (New York, 1998), 4; Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York, 1999), 4; Ellen Fitzpatrick, *History’s Memory: Writing America’s Past, 1880–1980* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 8.

⁵ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, 2001), 112; Rosslyn Haynes, “Tasmanian Landscapes in Painting, Poetry, and Print,” in *Memory, Monuments, Museums: The Past in the Present*,

The existence of a research program does not mean that all the intellectual production it fosters is uniformly derived from a single hypothesis. In the model of the Hungarian-born philosopher of science Imre Lakatos, the practice of scholarship is described as a series of hypotheses related to a broad research program. In the MVHA that program centered on the topics of the valley and the West, though it drew from Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis for its most important specific hypothesis. Though Turner had left the University of Wisconsin and gone east to teach at Harvard University in 1910, he had already become a prominent intellectual mentor of the association. As one disciple, Solon Buck, remarked in a 1923 review of the MVHA's intellectual project, the "largely antiquarian focus" of local history had under Turner's influence been altered by "emphasis on the importance of the frontier, of sectionalism, and of social and economic forces in the development of the American people." The 1931 annual meeting in Lexington, Kentucky, held shortly before Turner's death, featured moving tributes and a discussion of his mounting influence in the previous decades. But not all research proceeded from what later became known as the Turner thesis. Research did not follow the tight testing of a single hypothesis. It was not until the 1930s that a sizable number of references to Frederick Jackson Turner and his frontier thesis appeared in articles in the association's journal. As Frederic L. Paxson noted in 1931, "the new crops of doctors of philosophy that were just making their appearance seemed to have adopted it as a matter of course." It was, particularly in the pre-1920 foundation period, the region and the Mississippi Valley, rather than the Turner thesis specifically, that best defined research patterns. This highlights not an intellectual paradigm alone but also the institutional framework and regional focus—"the Valley"—that the association provided.⁶

The cohesion of the group was enhanced by its annual conferences, as well as by the semiannual meetings it held in association with the American Historical Association (AHA) each December. Equally important, publications provided a vital focus, as in any professional association. In the annual *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, which appeared until 1923–1924, the topic of the valley dominated. Seven of the nine papers at the first annual meeting reflected valley themes.⁷ But more than anything else, establishment of the quarterly *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (MVHR) in 1914 under the editorship of Clarence Alvord gave impetus to research on the history of the American West. Since the journal gave preference to MVHA members in accepting material for publication, the MVHR promoted cohesive research. While not excluding national themes, editors Alvord (1914–1923) and Milo Quaife (1924–1930), stressed the "unity of development" of the area.⁸ Reviews and articles were not restricted to a narrow region, but the valley was the most important theme. We of the early twenty-first century forget

ed. Marilyn Lake (Melbourne, 2006), 194; Katie Holmes, "Planting Hopes with Potatoes: Gardens, Memory, and Place Making," *ibid.*, 173; Glassberg, *Sense of History*, 111.

⁶ Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes: Philosophical Papers*, vol. I (Cambridge, Eng., 1977); Solon Buck, "The Progress and Possibilities of Mississippi Valley History," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 10 (June 1923), 6; John W. Oliver, "The Twenty-fourth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," *ibid.*, 18 (Sept. 1931), 218–20, esp. 219.

⁷ Clarence Alvord, "The Study and Writing of History in the Mississippi Valley," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 1 (1907–1908), 98–110; Solon Buck, "Some Materials for the Social History of the Mississippi Valley in the Nineteenth Century," *ibid.*, 4 (1910–1911), 139–51.

⁸ "Report of the Secretary-Treasurer for the Year 1939–1940," in "Thirty-third Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," by Hesseltine, 256; Alvord, "Study and Writing of History in the Mississippi Valley," 98–110; "News and Comments," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 1 (June 1914), 157–58.

the extent to which American consciousness in the nineteenth century related to valleys as sources of settlement, sustenance, and transport, since until the 1860s much of the nation's export trade depended on waterways, especially the Mississippi River. The MVHA did not neglect this legacy. The word "Mississippi" appeared in the title of articles in the *MVHR* 50 times from 1914 to 1957 (annual meeting reports excluded) with "Mississippi Valley" appearing in 50 percent of those titles; prior to 1939 many other articles and papers at conferences dealt with related regional subjects such as the Northwest, the Great Plains, and the Middle West. World War II constituted a clear dividing line, however. From 1941 to 1957, "the Mississippi" entered into an article's title only 8 times. Thus the valley remained until the 1940s a staple concept.⁹

The development of the association and its regional motif reflected the place of the Mississippi in the American imagination at the turn of the twentieth century. Albert Bushnell Hart of Harvard wrote in 1900, "The Mississippi Valley yields to no region in the world in interest, in romance, and in promise for the future. Here, if anywhere, is the real America—the field, the theater, and the basis of the civilization of the Western World." This was also a theme taken up by Frederick Jackson Turner in a 1910 address to the MVHA, "The Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History." Therein, Turner used the history of the valley as the fundamental template for the frontier process in which a succession of intricate waves of settlement shaped the character of American life. Romantic ideas of the valley and its critical role went beyond specifically Turnerian impulses, however, and persisted for more than thirty years. The same striving for coherence was seen in 1939 in MVHA president William O. Lynch's survey, "The Mississippi Valley and Its History." Even later, older members typically referred to "the great valley" and "its expanding story."¹⁰

But academic historians prominent in the MVHA as early as the 1910s were not merely promoting local memories or regional pride. Like others in the first generation of American professional historians active from the 1880s to about 1910, they enlisted in the effort to create objective, scientific history. Modeled on the inductive sciences, it would be grounded in the search for facts, the use of documents as analogous to laboratory specimens, and critical analysis of those specimens in seminars. The implicit, ultimate goal was the discovery of evolutionary laws of history; there were explicit hopes of using the comparative method to establish a universal history. Such historians saw it as their duty to discipline memory, to subject it to critical analysis, and to broaden its context beyond the personal and the local. Turner and others paying homage to the Mississippi Valley as a region nevertheless believed it was destined to be the powerhouse of a nation. Influenced by the Progressive Era spurt in nationalism, they wished to draw the great American West into the American mainstream. To Turner, building on Hart, "The social destiny

⁹ See, for example, Charles W. Hackett, "The Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 10, part 1 (1918–1919), 15; Buck, "Progress and Possibilities of Mississippi Valley History," 6. The regionally focused studies included 5 on the Ohio Valley (with 4 before 1941); 7 on the Middle West (6 before 1941); 4 on regionalism (3 before 1941); and 13 on the Old Northwest (10 before 1941). In addition, 12 citations were for surveys of western historical societies published prior to 1920.

¹⁰ Albert Bushnell Hart, "The Future of the Mississippi Valley," *Harper's Magazine*, 101 (Feb. 1900), 413, quoted in Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 3 (1909–1910), 159; Turner, "Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History," 159–84; William O. Lynch, "The Mississippi Valley and Its History," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 26 (June 1939), 3–20; Herbert A. Kellar, "The Historian and Life," *ibid.*, 34 (June 1947), 26, 27; Sellers, "Before We Were Members," 13.



In October 1907, during the deliberations that led to the founding of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, representatives from state historical societies and archives in Nebraska, Montana, Kansas, Iowa, Missouri, and Minnesota gathered at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln for a photograph. They are, from left to right, first row: Benjamin F. Shambaugh, Francis A. Sampson, and George W. Martin; second row: Edwin Maxey, Edgar A. Harlan, Warren Upham, and William S. Bell; third row: William E. Hannan, Clarence S. Paine, and Elmer E. Blackman. *Courtesy Photograph Collections, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

of this Valley will be the social destiny, and will mark the place in history, of the United States.” In Hart’s terms, “Its future is the future of one of the most powerful of modern nations.”¹¹

Thus the problem for the MVHA from its inception was its dual nature. It drew on a regional base of support, with its imagination rooted in the valley, and yet it was linked to nation. Moreover, the pull of nation became stronger over time because the category of “historical memory” itself was unstable, subject to changing political and institutional forces. The MVHA research program, guided by the precepts of scientific, objective history, converted private memory into written, critical history and placed it in an intellectually constructed space that increasingly focused on nation. Emotional and institutional forces promoting American nationalism reinforced this intellectual project, as state bureaucracy and power expanded during World War I and again during the 1930s. Though the MVHA stood out until World War II, and even beyond, as a society in which regional traditions were important, its work mediated between region and nation, reducing the friction between academics and state and local historians. The increasingly national institutional framework of American politics, together with the growth of a nationally networked historical discipline, over time reduced the importance of place in the MVHA.

¹¹ On scientific history, see Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890–1970* (Chicago, 2005), 25; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, esp. 38; and W. Stull Holt, “The Idea of Scientific History in America,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1 (June 1940), 352–62. Turner, “Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History,” 160; Hart, quoted *ibid.*, 159.

Beginnings

The impetus for the MVHA did not come from academic history departments but from state historical societies of the Midwest that were themselves becoming professionalized. A meeting of state society officials at the St. Louis World's Fair in September 1904 had mooted the idea of "common works on the history of the Louisiana Purchase." Cooperation centered temporarily on the Conference of Historical Societies, a loosely affiliated body established by the American Historical Association at its December 1904 meeting. No action on a separate Mississippi Valley organization came until the summer of 1907, when Clarence Paine, the secretary of the Nebraska State Historical Society, invited the other state historical societies throughout the valley to a meeting in Lincoln for the purpose of "effecting a permanent organization for the advancement of historical research, and the collection of historical material in these western states." He proposed that the group would meet alternately in the headquarters of the various state societies.¹² At this meeting, seven founders drafted a constitution with Francis Sampson of the State Historical Society of Missouri as interim president. As his original call to state historical societies advertised, Paine wished the work of the new association to include the popularization of history, as well as its conservation and the promotion of research. In addition to Nebraska, delegates came from Montana, Kansas, Iowa (two), Missouri, and Minnesota. In December 1907 the group reconvened along with academics attending the annual meeting of the AHA in Madison, Wisconsin, where the participants agreed on a final constitution. At that point academic historians, most notably Clarence Alvord of the University of Illinois, joined in. Alvord became vice president, and Thomas Owen of the Alabama State Department of Archives and History president.¹³

The region itself was not self-evident or clearly defined by the association's pioneers. The original call named as the area of concern the "western states," but Paine also used the phrase, "those states embraced within the Louisiana Purchase," which excluded a good deal of the valley. In the first issue of the MVHA *Proceedings*, for 1908, Alvord clarified the area of interest as between the Allegheny Mountains and the Rocky Mountains, a much broader but still regionally defined expanse, a position essentially reaffirmed by the editor of the association's journal, Milo Quaife, in 1924. This became the accepted, if obviously tendentious, concept of "the Valley," and that shorthand term is used to describe the region in what follows. The region was being constructed imaginatively with contested notions of space and place. This construction of place would eventually allow the MVHA to tilt toward a national focus. The region of interest was quickly extended into the Southwest borderlands, with Eugene Barker of the University of Texas an important contributor. By the mid-1920s, the American Southeast was also represented on the executive. Still, the idea of the Mississippi Valley as the central core of American life—its most dynamic and vital part—continued to hold the imagination of members.¹⁴

¹² Henry E. Bourne, "The Work of American Historical Societies," in *American Historical Association Annual Report, 1904* (Washington, 1905), 127; Clarence Alvord to Clarence Paine, July 22, 1908, file 1908 A-C, box 24, Organization of American Historians Records; Clarence Paine to W. P. Campbell, Sept. 16, 1907, file 190[?]-1908 A-C, *ibid.*

¹³ A bibliographer and paleontologist, Francis Asbury Sampson was secretary and librarian of the State Historical Society of Missouri from 1901 to 1915; see <http://www.umsystem.edu/whmc/invent/3813.html>. On Clarence W. Alvord, see "Historical News and Comments," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 15 (June 1928), 153-61; and Solon J. Buck, "Clarence Walworth Alvord, Historian," *ibid.* (Dec. 1928), 309-20.

¹⁴ Aeschbacher, "Mississippi Valley Historical Association," 341, quoted in Sellers, "Before We Were Members," 4; "News and Comments," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 1 (June 1914), 158; "News and Comments," *ibid.*,

The association was on one level the herculean effort of Paine as secretary-treasurer. But it also registered the collective stirring of the historical societies in the region and the actions of academic historians to promote closer relationships with them. The 1904 AHA Conference of Historical Societies had reflected a rising interest in state and local history among academic historians caused by the beginnings of professionalization in archives, libraries, and state historical societies. The forces promoting the MVHA sprang from the same soil, with much of the dynamic for this early cooperation coming from local and state historical societies. Writing in 1909, Turner interpreted the MVHA as part of the growth of “sectional consciousness”: While the AHA had become

a genuine gathering of historical students from all parts of the nation, there have also arisen societies in various sections to deal with the particular history of the groups of States. In part this is due to the great distances . . . but we would be short-sighted, indeed, who failed to perceive in the formation of the Pacific Coast Historical Association, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, and the Ohio Valley Historical Association, for example, genuine and spontaneous manifestations of a sectional consciousness.

In discussing the Ohio group, Turner acknowledged the role of memory and place in this new historical consciousness. He observed that “these associations spring in large part from the recognition in each of a common past, a common body of experiences, traditions, institutions and ideals.” Turner used such common experiences to develop his arguments about American sectionalism as a force in American history as he had used them in his earlier work on the frontier. The valley thus contributed to his intellectual project as much as his ideas of the frontier informed the MVHA’s project.¹⁵

How common the sentiment of sectional or regional consciousness was is demonstrated by the rise of another society remarkably similar to the MVHA. The movement to exchange information and develop cross-institutional links within geographically defined spaces was paralleled in the now almost entirely forgotten Ohio Valley Historical Association (OVHA), envisioned during that same summer of 1907 by the University of Cincinnati historian Isaac Joslin Cox. Also significant in its founding were genealogists such as Harry Brent Mackoy of Frankfort, Kentucky, a lawyer and aficionado within Kentucky’s Filson Club (founded 1884, later the Filson Historical Society). Cox and Mackoy allied in an effort to bring universities, state historical societies, genealogical groups, and other historical organizations together in a society where methods would be exchanged and the connections between work on the Ohio Valley and wider historiography explored.¹⁶

Founded in November 1907, just a month after the MVHA, the OVHA was a potential competitor for Paine’s fledgling group, since both self-consciously sought to unify mid-western societies. But the Ohio Valley lacked the grandness associated with the imagination of the Mississippi Valley and its role in American history. The former’s supporters

11 (Sept. 1924), 304; Aeschbacher, “Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 342.

¹⁵ Ian Tyrrell, “Good Beginnings: The AHA and the First Conference of Historical Societies, 1904,” *History News*, 59 (Autumn 2004), 21–24; Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Ohio Valley in American History,” in *The Frontier in American History*, by Frederick Jackson Turner (New York, 1920), 159–60; Turner, “Significance of the Mississippi Valley in American History,” 178, 193; Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York, 1932); Ray Allen Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York, 1973), 209–32.

¹⁶ “The Central Ohio Valley Historical Conference,” *Ohio History*, 17 (Jan. 1908), 99–104; “Second Annual Meeting of the Ohio Valley Historical Association: Marietta, Ohio, November 27 and 28, 1908,” *ibid.*, 18 (July 1909), 391–98, <http://publications.ohiohistory.org/ohstemplate.cfm?action=toc&vol=18>.

could not claim as plausibly to be the heart of the nation, however important local people's pride and Turner's praise of their work. Instead, the fate of the OVHA would at best be absorption into the MVHA. The two held a joint meeting in 1910 and the idea of merging was put to members. The societies did not amalgamate, however, due to local opposition in the Ohio Valley group; the OVHA continued as an independent body, operating essentially as an annual conference. Gradually the OVHA faded in importance, and its activities and membership were subsumed into the Ohio Historical and Archaeological Society, a more determinedly amateur and local group, and the MVHA. Leading academic members drifted into the MVHA, notably Cox, who became a member of the board of editors of the *MVHR* in 1916. The lack of a journal as a focal point proved a serious obstacle to the internal cohesion of the OVHA and to its ability to claim the allegiance of professional scholars.¹⁷

Another reason for OVHA's eclipse was that the MVHA could serve as a mediator between local and national institutions. Conceiving of the valley as the heart of the nation led its founders immediately to engage the AHA and to seek both to distinguish their association from that body and to develop an alliance with it. If the MVHA faced competition from smaller regional groups, it also faced the question of its relations with the AHA. In 1903 the latter had recognized the logistical difficulties for academics on the Pacific Coast who wished to attend AHA meetings, which were usually held in the East. The AHA therefore established the Pacific Coast Branch as an affiliate, but the AHA leadership was wary of splinter societies. A similar affiliate status for the MVHA was mooted, but the two organizations could not agree on terms. To affiliate, the MVHA would have to pay its individual dues to the AHA, which would drain the small organization of funds. Instead, the MVHA continued independently, and tension persisted between the two groups even though the MVHA, as a compromise, convened its own semiannual programs in conjunction with the annual AHA conventions.¹⁸

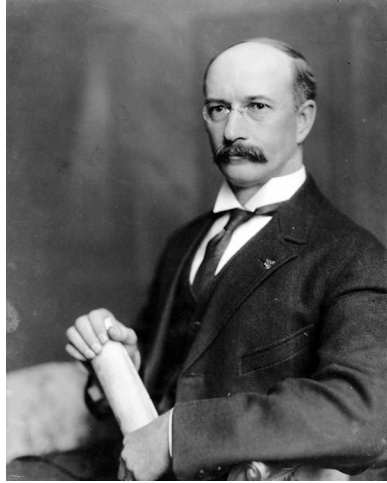
Growth

Expansion was rapid if uncertain. From its 7 original members in 1907, the association attained, after struggling initially, what Paine called "phenomenal growth." By May 1909 he told a colleague, "the membership covers the entire United States and Canada." He was talking about 253 members; by 1910 there were 500. By 1933 there were 986 members, of whom 21 were outside the United States, but numbers stalled during the depression, rising to 1,118 by 1938–1939. About half the "members" were subscribing libraries.¹⁹ The early growth came partly from the association's inclusiveness. It absorbed members from state historical societies and among amateur historians and librarians

¹⁷ "Report of the Secretary-Treasurer," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 4 (1910–1911), 34; *Fourth Annual Meeting of the Ohio Historical Association: Indianapolis, Ind., December 27–30, 1910*, box 78, Organization of American Historians Records; "Central Ohio Valley Historical Conference"; "Second Annual Meeting of the Ohio Valley Historical Association."

¹⁸ Alvord to Clarence Paine, Jan. 7, 1908, file 1908 A–C, box 24, Organization of American Historians Records; Clarence Paine to S. Bell, Dec. 7, 1907, file 1907 A–Z, *ibid.*; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 182; Wunder, "Founding Years of the OAH," 6; Tyrrell, *Historians in Public*, 219–20.

¹⁹ Clarence Paine to Perry L. Smith, May 22, 1909, file 1909 S, box 24, Organization of American Historians Records; Clarence Paine to Jay Amon Barrett, May 17, 1910, file 1910 A–C, *ibid.*; "Membership by States March 31, 1933," box 15, Executive Committee Minutes, 1930–1957, *ibid.*; "Report of the Secretary-Treasurer . . . April 1, 1938 to March 31, 1939," *ibid.*; William O. Lynch, "The Twenty-third Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 17 (Sept. 1930), 315.



Clarence S. Paine, secretary of the Nebraska State Historical Society, provided the vision for a historical society based in “the Valley” that would bring together amateurs, state historical society representatives, other public historians, and academics. *Courtesy Photograph Collections, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

across the Mississippi Valley and the Great Plains. It also drew high school teachers, forming a Teachers’ Section in 1911 and including much material on history teaching in the annual *Proceedings* during the 1910s. At times high school teachers had their own program at the MVHA annual meetings and representation on the MVHA executive. From 1936 to 1947, the *Review* revived the “Teacher’s Section” as a regular feature, and the Teachers’ Section itself was not disbanded until 1959. Nevertheless, in the 1950s interest in the high schools diminished in the MVHA as it did in the wider historical profession, as conflicts over progressive education and teacher hostility to academic critics of the social studies curriculum grew.²⁰

Almost from the outset, the association did not limit its membership to the valley; it had members from as far away as Massachusetts, such as Albert Bushnell Hart and the patrician scholar Charles Francis Adams. Similarly, its leadership was not entirely geographically prescribed. As early as 1926, E. Merton Coulter, a North Carolinian teaching at the University of Georgia, served on the Executive Committee, though he was born and bred outside the valley. But the shift away from the valley can be easily exaggerated. Coulter, for instance, had graduate degrees from the University of Wisconsin, taught for a time at Marietta College in Ohio, and wrote articles on the Mississippi region. Moreover, MVHA presidents and most leading officials continued to be drawn from the valley until the mid-1950s.²¹

²⁰ Clarence Paine to Clarence Burton, May 27, 1911, file 1911 A–C, box 24, Organization of American Historians Records. See, for example, “The Meeting of the North Central History Teachers Association, 1911,” *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 4 (1910–1911), 243–44, and succeeding articles; Aeschbacher, “Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 350; Lynch, “Twenty-third Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 314; Edward Everett Dale, “Teaching on the Prairie Plains, 1890–1900,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 33 (Sept. 1946), 293–307; William D. Aeschbacher, “Report of the Secretary-Treasurer for the Year 1959–1960,” *ibid.*, 47 (Sept. 1960), 389–90.

²¹ Cf. Aeschbacher, “Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 343. Chauncey S. Boucher, “The Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 9, part 3 (1917–1918), 341; E. Merton Coulter, “Commercial Intercourse with the Confederacy in the Mississippi Valley, 1861–1865,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 5 (March 1919), 377–95; E. Merton Coulter, “The Efforts



Clara Paine was secretary-treasurer of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (MVHA) from 1916 to 1952 and a strong supporter of its regional traditions. She was also active in the Nebraska chapter of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, an amateur group that promoted genealogical research and patriotic education. Her activities suggest the ways regional memory, scholarly work, and public history could reinforce each other in the early MVHA. *Courtesy Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, Indiana University–Purdue University, Indianapolis, Indiana.*

The association's focus tended to be the upper rather than the lower Mississippi. The crucial individuals were Benjamin Shambaugh, who edited and secured the printing of the early *Proceedings* through the Torch Press in Iowa, and Alvord and Quaife, the first two *MVHR* editors. In the 1930s and 1940s the influential Minnesotans Theodore Blegen and Herbert Kellar, as well as the Nebraska-based James Sellers and the "son of Iowa" Louis Pelzer, perpetuated this tradition. The association's southern membership was affected by the growth of the Southern Historical Association, formed in 1934. Of the 33 meetings from 1915 to 1947, 13 were held below St. Louis, but the membership from that section was proportionately lower; less than 25 percent of membership in the latter year came from south of St. Louis. This at a time when racial segregation had not yet become an issue in the siting of annual conventions, as it would in the 1950s.²²

The driving force in the early growth was Secretary-Treasurer Clarence Paine, who, his wife Clara Paine reported, "always exhausted himself by over work." At his premature death in 1916, Clara Paine succeeded to the position of secretary, a position she held until illness forced her retirement in 1952. She saw the organization as a work dedicated to the memory of her husband. "My interest in this association is a very vital one. It is the

of the Democratic Societies of the West to Open the Navigation of the Mississippi," *ibid.*, 11 (Dec. 1924), 376–89; E. Merton Coulter, "Effects of Secession upon the Commerce of the Mississippi Valley," *ibid.*, 3 (Dec. 1916), 275–300; *Directory of American Scholars: A Biographical Directory* (Lancaster, 1951), 187.

²²"Historical News," *American Historical Review*, 52 (Oct. 1946), 221. Louis Pelzer (1879–1946) was managing editor of the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* from 1941 to 1946. Carl Coke Rister to Ralph Bieber, May 22, 28, 1947, file 1947 B, box 36, Organization of American Historians Records; Bieber to Rister, June 2, 1947, *ibid.*; William C. Binkley to Clarence Paine, June 5, 1947, *ibid.*

monument Mr. Paine left and I would have given it my best efforts had there been no remuneration." However, Clara Paine had already done much of the unpaid labor. In "the first years of the association" she did "all the work of a clerical nature. When it became so heavy [that] it was necessary to employ a stenographer I still relieved Mr. Paine of all I could." Clara Paine remained vital to the association throughout the interwar years. According to John D. Hicks, president in 1932–1933, it was upon her "more than [upon Frederic] Paxson or any of his students or any historian" that "the continued success of the Association" depended. Indeed, during his term Hicks "had consulted constantly about the affairs of the association" with Paine.²³

As Clara Paine's contribution indicated, the cement holding the association together was not purely academic. The structure and content of the conferences reinforced cohesion. The small size and community of knowledge that prevailed until the 1940s enhanced a regional identity. With 80 attending the New Orleans meeting of 1927, Ray Allen Billington characterized the group as a "close-knit society" made closer by the intimacy of its meetings. Free lunches and dinners sponsored by host groups such as local historical societies encouraged attendance and conviviality. Most meetings reflected, often at the socials, on the history of the association, with each festive occasion providing another pleasant memory to recall at the next. The cumulative building of a regional collective memory may have occasionally seemed oppressive to younger members forced to learn the rituals, but that does not undermine the central point. William B. Hesseltine reported of the 1940 conference: "the dry-as-dust tradition of historians was not always in evidence," with entertainment coming from master raconteurs such as Edward Dale and Avery Craven and the "droll" wit of Hicks. The sessions themselves were often unconventional, and conference presentations could be lively. In 1940 Philip Jordan spoke on "Songs of the Times, 1830–1850," with selections sung by the University of Omaha Quartette, drawing on the repertoire of the antebellum group, the Hutchinsons. The historians left the meeting with the tune of "'Uncle Sam's Farm' ringing in their ears."²⁴

This was largely a male experience, a fact that reinforced camaraderie and institutional cohesion; in practice, "faculty" meant males, who could be accompanied to the meeting dinners by "wives," and even "daughters." Social events, particularly the traditionally all-male smokers, promoted male bonding. Formal smokers were held on at least 22 occasions between 1918 and 1955, compared with only 6 recorded for the AHA over the same period. Not only were social events less prominent in AHA meetings; they were never documented in the loving detail given in MVHA reports. Nor did the number of such events diminish with increased specialization and professionalization because the association was still relatively small and (male) networks of communication perpetuated its traditions.²⁵

The practices of remembering and forgetting that privileged male traditions notwithstanding, the MVHA's regional connections meant that women were bound to have more

²³ Clara Paine to Frederic L. Paxson, April 21, 1917, file 1917 N–P, box 26, Organization of American Historians Records; John D. Hicks to Avery Craven, n.d., in reply to Craven to Hicks, July 9, 1936, box 13, John D. Hicks Papers (Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

²⁴ Billington, "From Association to Organization," 76; Hesseltine, "Thirty-third Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," 253.

²⁵ Hesseltine, "Thirty-third Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," esp. 252–53. For the earliest mention of a smoker, see Boucher, "Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," 346. For smoking's historical connections with literary attainment, see Richard Klein, *Cigarettes Are Sublime* (Durham, 1993); and G. Cabrera Infante, *Holy Smoke* (London, 1985). On masculine smoking practices, see Ian Tyrrell, "The Limits of Persuasion: Advertising, Gender, and the Culture of Australian Smoking," *Australian Historical Studies* (no. 114, April 2000), 27–47.

space than in the AHA because it was in local and state history, including state historical societies, that women were most prominent and most acceptable to male historians. Clara Paine quickly became indispensable, but she was initially welcomed somewhat awkwardly as secretary-treasurer in 1916–1917, and she took no part in academic activities. Women such as Grace Nute of the Minnesota Historical Society, Bessie Pierce of the University of Iowa and University of Chicago, and the Minnesotan Henrietta Larson, who moved in 1928 from Southern Illinois State College to a research position at Harvard, gave papers, took part in committees, and promoted progressive social and economic history as well as the study of ethnicity. At the 1950 meeting, Angie Debo was one of two women talking on Native Americans in Oklahoma.²⁶ But the openness to women should not be exaggerated. More commonly, women were involved in the many receptions that gave the MVHA meeting its drawing power. Women were added to the committees for local arrangements far more often than to other committees. The Oklahoma meeting in 1923 was typical of the way women were treated as part of conference recreations and decoration. The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) hosted a reception at which “Mrs.” Czarina C. Conlan introduced participants in the Indian feature program at the University of Oklahoma Indian Club. The MVHA had a woman president before Nellie Neilson served in that role for the AHA in 1943, but Louise Phelps Kellogg (1930–1931) was the only one to reach that position until the 1980s. Significantly, she was a student of Frederick Jackson Turner and a research associate at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for forty years.²⁷

Relation to State and Local History

The regional focus enabled the association and its members to pursue innovative paths during its early years. Despite the emphasis on professionalism, the association could promote close linkages with grass-roots historical activity because of its connection to the state and local societies. Officials of those societies not only founded the MVHA; they were also important in guaranteeing the journal’s financial stability through war and depression. Though academic historians are thought to have “contemptuously cast aside” antiquarians “during the professionalization of history in the late nineteenth century,” within the MVHA academic historians maintained exchanges with diverse nonacademics for a much longer period, lasting in some respects until the 1940s. The MVHA had several reasons to maintain contacts with state and local historians, including amateur historians and genealogists.²⁸

²⁶ Colin B. Goodykoontz, “The Forty-third Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 37 (Sept. 1950), 284–85; Benjamin Shambaugh, “The Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” *ibid.*, 10 (Sept. 1923), 126; Blegen, “Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 251. Cf. Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880–1945* (Chapel Hill, 2003), 97.

²⁷ In 1939 one-fifth of the 35 on the local arrangements committee were women; see “Report of the Secretary-Treasurer for the Year 1939–1940,” 254. Shambaugh, “Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 125. Czarina C. Conlan was supervisor of the Indian Department of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Czarina C. Conlan, “Annual Report of Czarina C. Conlan, February 2, 1926,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 4 (March 1926), 70–71, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/v004/v004p070.html>.; William C. Haygood, “Louise Phelps Kellogg,” in *Notable American Women, 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Edward James and Janet James (3 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1971), II, 321–22.

²⁸ Karen Haltunnen, “Transnationalism and American Studies in Place,” address at the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Japanese Association for American Studies, June 10, 2006, p. 11 (in Ian Tyrrell’s possession).

Key MVHA personnel included such people. The founder, Clarence Paine, was not an academic. Paine had no formal historical training and was also secretary-treasurer of the Nebraska Territorial Pioneers' Association and an associate of the Great Plains promoter J. Sterling Morton in the production of a history of Nebraska. He strove to get non-academics to attend public meetings during the inaugural conference in 1907 and wanted to "popularize" history.²⁹ But this was not a simple matter of amateurs versus professionals. Paine straddled the boundaries between amateur and professional historian since he was a state functionary charged with conserving, cataloging, and storing state records and hence one who worked with both academics and members of the public who might use those records.

Not only did the association have links with the state historical agencies of the Mississippi Valley—it also had early connections with pioneer societies and genealogists. Among the members was George B. Merrick of Madison, Wisconsin, the author of *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi* (1908) and secretary of both the Thirtieth Wisconsin Voluntary Infantry Association and the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers Pilots' Association. The period around World War I brought heightened genealogical and historical society activity throughout the United States, and in response the MVHA formed a Committee on Recognition of Hereditary Patriotic Societies in 1914, though inactivity on the part of its nonacademic chairman made doing "something tangible" difficult. The work was soon superseded by an enlarged effort to have historic sites marked, in which patriotic society activity was encouraged, but the local associations in the valley continued a presence in the MVHA after World War I. Thus a state chapter of the DAR joined in the association's 1923 meeting, and Clara Paine herself was in the 1930s registrar of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America for Nebraska.³⁰

Though earlier reviews of the MVHA's history have claimed that academic historians took control by the 1920s, the presidents from 1921 to 1931 included five from state historical societies; the majority of those were state functionaries with some college training, but not all. Because in 1900–1930 state historical societies were in transition from amateur to professional status, amateur enthusiasts could, via such societies, still participate in the MVHA. William Elsey Connelley, secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1914–1930, was an amateur historian who served as MVHA president in 1921–1922. A self-taught businessman and teacher, he exemplified the tradition of the antiquarian as a collector whose activities were characterized by curiosity, enthusiasm, and love of subject rather than formal training or expertise: "He read everything he could lay hands on—literature, science, philosophy. And history was a favorite study." After Connelley spent a period as a teacher and a lumberman, "history came to be his infatuation, especially the fascinating story of Kansas. Into this," a biographical entry notes, "he has delved and drudged for forty years. He has written much, and like every enthusiast, hopes to write

²⁹ See, for example, Clarence Paine to Giles Mead, Jan. 21, 1908, file 1908 A–C, box 24, Organization of American Historians Records.

³⁰ George Byron Merrick, *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi: The Recollections of a Steamboat Pilot from 1854 to 1863* (Cleveland, 1908); Clarence Paine to George B. Merrick, Sept. 16, 1914, file 1914 M–N, box 25, Organization of American Historians Records; George B. Merrick, "Joshua Reynolds and the Diamond Jo Line Steamship, 1862–1911," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 8 (1914–1915), 217–61; Tyrrell, *Historians in Public*, 217; Clarence Paine, "Report of the Secretary Treasurer," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 9, part 1 (1915–1916), 42; "Minutes of Business Transacted," *ibid.*, 10, part 1 (1918–1919), 39; Shambaugh, "Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," 125; Clara Paine to Hicks, Oct. 14, 1936, box 13, Hicks Papers.

more and more.” The last president to come from a decidedly amateur background was Otto L. Schmidt (1926–1927), a medical doctor who also served as president of the Chicago Historical Society.³¹

However, cooperation between amateurs and professionals was not always cozy and seamless. There were tensions between the two in the MVHA, as there were in the AHA. James Newton Baskett, a civil servant and amateur history enthusiast from Missouri, had crossed swords with Benjamin Shambaugh in submitting for publication a paper from the 1909 conference at St. Louis. Baskett protested to Paine about what he called Shambaugh’s “superciliousness” in editing and condemned his “arbitrary changes.” These were “finical and puerile.” Baskett referred to Shambaugh as “the professor” who had shown that he did not understand the text. “One Spanish sentence was made ridiculous” and the meaning of many things “misconvey[ed].” Even after modifications had been made to the piece, Shambaugh did not have room in the MVHA *Proceedings*. Paine sympathized with Baskett, emphasizing that he himself was “considered a ‘barbarian,’ by the distinguished scholars with whom I am associated.” He told Baskett, “my opinion would not count much with them when it came to a question such as has arisen with reference to your manuscript.” Clarence Burton, a lawyer and the director of the Burton Historical Library in Detroit, had also complained to Paine, who replied: “I appreciate what you say about the ‘academics,’ and assure you that I have had my share of grief in trying to do business according to their ideas.”³²

Despite such tensions, there were good reasons to cooperate. Paine found academics compliant on the everyday affairs of the association, telling Burton “they are pretty generally letting me have my own way now and everything seems to be progressing nicely.” While Paine was given a free run over the business side and the academics made no effort to exclude the amateurs, nonacademics also had important intellectual reasons for cooperation. They recognized that trained historians could bring skills to the analysis of documents, and they appreciated the need to record memory. F. M. Annis of the Aurora Historical Society in Illinois reported, “In our little Historical Society here in Aurora, I am insisting upon everything connected with the present being preserved now, when we are able to do so.” Annis stressed “having history written down as soon as possible after it is made. But at the time, people do not think so much about such things; and interest only becomes aroused after the facts have faded out of memory.” History was a matter not merely of memory, but of the preservation of memory and the presentation of “facts,” something that opened up the chance for distinguishing between popular and historical memory. Henry J. Patten, a prominent amateur backer of the MVHA, was described as displaying “a profound respect for those who brought scientific methods to [the] interpretation” of local history. More prosaically, the amateurs realized that they did not have sufficient time to devote to historical research and writing. Harry Brent Mackoy, chair of the Committee on Recognition of Hereditary Patriotic Societies, told Paine in 1915 that his business interests had curtailed his work: “duty must be placed before pleasure, and

³¹ “William Elsey Connelley,” in *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans* (Chicago, 1918), <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1918ks/bioc/connelwe2.html>; James R. Grossman, Ann Durkin Keating, and Janice L. Reiff, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago, 2004), 990.

³² Clarence Paine to Burton, May 27, 1911, file 1911 A–C, box 24, Organization of American Historians Records; “Historical News and Comments,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 19 (March 1933), 633–42.

my work has been so confining of the past few months that I have had no opportunity to devote any time to historical research.”³³

Amateurs did not see academics as necessarily the enemy; they found allies in the MVHA who displayed empathy with localism and regionalism, often as a result of the professional historians' personal experience of the West. Philip Ashton Rollins was the New Hampshire-born writer of *The Cowboy: His Characteristics, His Equipment, and His Part in the Development of the West* (1922). In 1924 he thanked John D. Hicks for his review in the *MVHR*. Rollins stated that the book was based on personal experience of “our own ranches” where he had spent much time since his youth. But this intimate knowledge the Nebraska-based Hicks had shown that he shared. “Accurate knowledge of the history of the pioneer” was “one thing,” Rollins noted, “but an affectionate sympathy with him is another. And when the two elements are combined in a single person,” as they were with Hicks, the result was “very telling.”³⁴

Similarly, for the academics there were also practical advantages in including genealogists and local historians, since they provided organizational assets, as Paine and his family so notably did. Solon Buck spoke in 1923 of the “rapprochement” of historical societies and academics who sought local and state history help because “the history of the people” needed to be based on study of them in their local communities. The association's journal further underlined the importance of close relations with the historical societies and a wider public. Its finances were not underwritten only by universities. Private individuals of means and the leading midwestern historical societies were among the so-called guarantors. They included amateur historians such as Otto Schmidt; Julius Rosenwald, a prominent philanthropist; Gen. Charles G. Dawes, who served as vice president of the United States under Calvin Coolidge; the industrialist Cyrus McCormick Jr.; and other businessmen and amateur scholars. One highly dependable long-term guarantor of the *MVHR* from 1915–1916 on, Henry J. Patten, was a well-to-do Chicago grain merchant. When he died in 1939, a grateful association paid tribute to the importance of the amateur in its ranks: Patten was “a worthy representative of the pioneer ancestry from which he sprang” and a man with “wide knowledge of local history.” Patten sponsored a local history of his Illinois pioneer family, a work gingerly reviewed in the *MVHR*.³⁵

Such connections were not just tactics designed to maximize coverage or financial support. They arose because the boundaries between academics and public historians were

³³ Clarence Paine to Burton, May 27, 1911, file 1911 A–C, box 24, Organization of American Historians Records; F. M. Annis to Clarence Paine, March 10, 1912, file 1912 A–B, box 25, *ibid*. For the tribute to Henry J. Patten, see Clara Paine, “Report of the Secretary-Treasurer for the Year 1938–1939,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 26 (Sept. 1939), 229–30. Jennie M. Patten, *History of the Somonauk United Presbyterian Church near Sandwich, De Kalb County, Illinois, with Ancestral Lines of the Early Members* (Chicago, 1928); “Illinois Saint Andrew Society,” <http://www.chicago-scots.org/clubs/History/Names-P-Q.htm>; Harry Brent Mackoy to Clarence Paine, April 14, 1915, file Committee Structure 1914–1915, box 1, Organization of American Historians Records. See also Burton to Clarence Paine, May 6, 1908, file 1908 A–C, box 24, *ibid*.

³⁴ Philip Ashton Rollins, *The Cowboy: His Characteristics, His Equipment, and His Part in the Development of the West* (New York, 1922); John D. Hicks, review of *The Pioneer West* edited by Joseph Lewis French and *The Cowboy* by Philip Ashton Rollins, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 11 (June 1924), 140; Philip Ashton Rollins to Hicks, July 7, 1924, box 13, Hicks Papers.

³⁵ Hicks to Craven, n.d., in reply to Craven to Hicks, July 9, 1936, box 13, Hicks Papers; O. L. Schmidt to Clara Paine, July 16, 1916, file 1917 S–T, box 26, Organization of American Historians Records; Buck, “Progress and Possibilities of Mississippi Valley History,” 6; Paine, “Report of the Secretary-Treasurer for the Year 1938–1939,” 229–30; Patten, *History of the Somonauk United Presbyterian Church . . . with Ancestral Lines of the Early Members*; M. M. Quaife, review of *History of the Somonauk United Presbyterian Church near Sandwich, De Kalb County, Illinois, with Ancestral Lines of the Early Members* by Jennie M. Patten, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 15 (Sept. 1928), 288–90.

unclear, as the career of Harlow Lindley (1875–1959), president in 1918–1919, suggests. He served as director of the Department of History and Archives, Indiana State Library, from 1907 to 1923 and secretary of the Indiana Historical Commission from 1915 to 1923 while remaining a member of the Earlham College faculty. In the commission and in the pages of the association's *Proceedings*, Lindley and others emphasized the importance of the local historical pride developed through pageants. In other cases, academic historians moved into historical society work after long academic careers. James Alton James, a member of the first board of editors and president in 1913–1914, became director of the Chicago Historical Society in 1940, after retiring from Northwestern University.³⁶ James had a deep interest in local history, but in the 1910s such an overlap of academic interests with localized preoccupations was not uncommon. A wide variety of groups—including academic historians, their state history counterparts, local historians, and amateur archaeologists and antiquarians—promoted strong connections to the memory of place. These groups all sprang from similar circumstances. Thus academic historians engaged with the developing sense of historical memory among the public.

The Role of Memory

To understand how memory is deployed in society, historians have called for studies that historicize collective memory, its reception and diffusion.³⁷ Such a focus on collective memory offers ways to analyze the burst of historical activity and organization in early twentieth-century America, including historical practice in the MVHA. The MVHA became a valuable vessel for preserving and conduit for disseminating collective consciousness of the western region. The MVHA represented regional memories, helping deposit them in archives and in the texts of professional writing. The MVHA was also involved in professionalizing its members' own memory, since they not only studied the valley but also commonly either came from it or resided there.

It is not a modern imposition to talk about memory and history in the context of the valley's history and its academic historians. MVHA members, including academics, were aware of contemporary debates over historical societies' role in preserving memory. One of the most elaborate discussions came from the University of Minnesota sociologist and early MVHA member, George Vincent, who articulated the importance of history as "social memory" at the time when such ideas were being discussed in Europe. The task of the state historical society, Vincent noted in a 1916 address, was "enriching and strengthening the social memory" as an agency for "keeping this memory accurate, vivid, and widely diffused." This attention to factual accuracy was allied to the idea that historical memory must privilege the collective experience of the state and nation. "Without memory there can be no personality; without history no real nation or state." Academic "memory selects and preserves vivid and vital experiences; it forgets the trivial and unimportant," perpetuating "essential things." Others in the MVHA canvassed similar ideas. In 1923 Floyd

³⁶ "Harlow Lindley" [1918–1919], box 19, Past Presidents Files, Executive Board Records, Organization of American Historians Records; "About the Indiana Historical Bureau: Harlow Lindley," *Indiana Historical Bureau*, <http://www.statelib.lib.in.us/www/ihb/about/lindley.html>; Bernard Sobel, "Pageantry Possibilities," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 9, part 2 (1916–1917), 301–6; Harlow Lindley, "Possibilities in State Historical Celebrations," *ibid.*, 307–17. On James Alton James, see *Chicago Daily News*, Aug. 9, 1933, p. 27; and *Directory of American Scholars*, 463.

³⁷ Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review*, 102 (Dec. 1997), 1386–1403, esp. 1395.

C. Shoemaker spoke at the annual meeting on “the functioning of history in developing a unity of consciousness” in individual states. The valley’s academic historians also understood the importance of oral history in preserving memory. The *MVHR*’s “Historical News and Comments” section, where historical practice was frequently discussed, noted in 1928 that “the realm of established history” was separated “by a somewhat intangible line” from “the great body of oral traditions which each generation hands down to its successor.”³⁸ Sometimes *MVHA* meetings featured the reminiscences of amateur historians who “most delightfully” retold their “own personal experiences” of the beginnings of white settlement or related tales of Indian cultures as the novelist Stanley Vestal (University of Oklahoma professor of English W. S. Campbell) did at the twenty-fifth anniversary meeting. Participants praised his “uniquely interesting study,” which was based on interviews conducted in preparation for a biography of Sitting Bull. These tales were scarcely different in style from the reminiscences of old-time members such as Edward Dale, who spoke “with a cowboy’s skills, in discerning far horizons.”³⁹

On the level of ordinary historical practice, Turner and his students incorporated the vernacular understanding of place into their research on the valley. History and memory were clearly not separate here either. This was seen in the reminiscences of Dale, an Oklahoman who studied at Harvard in 1914 with Turner for a Ph.D. completed in 1922. Dale returned to the University of Oklahoma, where he became an expert on the history of frontier conditions in his own state. In 1936–1937 he served as *MVHA* president. Turner’s aim was to make Dale into an academic historian, standardizing his work and distinguishing his critical account from popular works on Oklahoma where the “romance of that region” was overemphasized. In recollections of his mentor, Dale reported that Turner had chided him for falling into errors “common to most amateurs” by failing to exercise critical judgment in selecting material. Nevertheless, for Turner the facts remained “dead” in Dale’s draft account of Oklahoma settlement; he identified a pressing need to “add human interest” derived from popular accounts or the memories of participants.⁴⁰

The materials and processes that Turner highlighted were dredged up from, or had resonance with, Dale’s own memories of the frontier: “When Turner referred to the frontier of the hunter, the cowboy, and of pioneer agriculture he was on ground which was strangely familiar.” For Dale, theories of the frontier did not exist outside his experience of it. As he put it, “Proof of every theory which Turner advanced I had witnessed in practice, though at the time it had been meaningless.” Turner opened his student to the possibilities of crystallizing personal memory of the frontier and drawing on it in historical accounts. He professed to be personally open to different ways of seeing and viewing history, deriving them from experience of the frontier in his own hometown of Portage, Wisconsin, and he expressed an interest in Dale’s edition of the gunfighter Frank M. Canton’s impressionistic

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1392; George E. Vincent, “The Social Memory,” *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 1 (Jan. 1916), 255, 252, 250. Floyd Shoemaker’s remarks are paraphrased in Shambaugh, “Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 123–24. “Historical News and Comments,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 15 (Sept. 1928), 293.

³⁹ Shambaugh, “Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” esp. 125; Blegen, “Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 248, 253. See also Hackett, “Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 25; Dorothy Dondore, “Points of Contact between History and Literature in the Mississippi Valley,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 11 (Sept. 1924), 227–36, esp. 227–28; Louis Pelzer et al., “Projects in American History and Culture,” *ibid.*, 31 (March 1945), 507; Theodore C. Blegen, “Our Widening Province,” *ibid.* (June 1944), 10.

⁴⁰ Edward Everett Dale, “Memories of Frederick Jackson Turner,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 30 (Dec. 1943), 347, 342.

Frontier Trails: “How fortunate you were in preserving his recollections.”⁴¹ Dale reported that Turner “seemed interested in my frontier experiences as hunter, cowboy, [and] clerk in a trading post.” That interest prompted Dale to “relate numerous yarns” to Turner, who “also related a number of his own.” Like the local historians, Turner appreciated the role of stories in western history, going so far as to confess that he did not believe a doctor’s degree made him a better historian. Turner’s position was similar to that of Theodore Blegen, MVHA president in 1943, who stressed the examination of creative arts, “of fiction and life, of everyday conditions” as essential to understanding “our regions.” In the MVHA an exclusively professional historiography was not imposed from above; professional historians drew on amateur writers, novelists, and local historians to absorb their stories of the American West. Place, as William Cronon has noted, took shape through storytelling about landscapes.⁴²

Vital connections with nonacademic audiences came from historical societies that promoted what is now called public history. Benjamin Shambaugh, who served as MVHA president in 1910–1911 and on the first editorial board of the *MVHR* in 1914, was a professor at the University of Iowa, but his work centered on the Iowa Applied History Series prepared under his direction as superintendent of the State Historical Society of Iowa. The series dealt with practical questions such as the history of workers’ compensation and welfare work. Shambaugh sought “to bring the light of history to bear upon the solution of current problems of legislation and administration.” Similarly, Archer Hulbert, a Harvard Ph.D. on the first board of editors who taught at Marietta College and later Colorado College, “lectured on the economics of good roads for the United States Department of Agriculture” from 1905 to 1914.⁴³ At the University of Oklahoma, Edward Dale joined an Interior Department survey of the Office of Indian Affairs that produced *The Problem of Indian Administration* (1928), known as the Meriam Report. The study identified “serious negative policies associated with the Indian Bureau” and recommended that the bureau could improve its work by muting its “age-old assimilationist policy.” The report also supported “introduction of Indian-oriented courses into the curriculum of the Indian schools.” Dale’s inspiration for pioneering college courses on the history of American Indians came, a recent authority averred, from that practical experience. Some association leaders, such as Herbert Kellar, MVHA president in 1946–1947 and a member of many MVHA committees, were purely public historians. Kellar had been hired in 1915 by Chicago’s McCormick family, manufacturers of farm machinery, to manage its archives collection as the McCormick Historical Association. A progressive historian with degrees from the University of Wisconsin, Kellar began a thirty-year career collecting not only manuscripts but also artifacts and memorabilia of agricultural America. Kellar’s

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 340, 341, 354; Edward Everett Dale, ed., *Frontier Trails: The Autobiography of Frank M. Canton* (1930; Norman, 1966).

⁴² Dale, “Memories of Frederick Jackson Turner,” 345, 342; Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York, 1968), 62–63; Blegen, “Our Widening Province,” 10; William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History*, 78 (March 1992), 1347–76.

⁴³ “Second Annual Meeting of the Association,” *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 2 (1908–1909), 17; David D. Van Tassel and James A. Tinsley, “Historical Organizations as Aids to History,” in *In Support of Clío: Essays in Memory of Herbert A. Kellar*, ed. William B. Hesseltine and Donald R. McNeil (Madison, 1958), 145; Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City, 2002), 82–86; Julian P. Boyd, “State and Local Historical Societies in the United States,” *American Historical Review*, 40 (Oct. 1934), esp. 31. *Dictionary of American Biography*, Supplement 1, 442–43; F. L. P., “Personal,” *American Historical Review*, 39 (April 1934), 597–98; Archer Hulbert, “A Centennial of Western Steamboat Navigation,” *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 4 (1910–1911), 59–64.

presidential address emphasized the integration into historians' narratives of the material life around them, especially the importance of incorporating technological change and material culture into the interpretation of history. Other members also displayed an interest in museums as ways of representing history through artifacts, though in the United States from the late nineteenth century on, such activity tended to be separated from archives and libraries. As early as 1910, an MVHA committee was established to report on the condition of museums, and it liaised with state societies and libraries on the question.⁴⁴

Historic Sites and National Parks

Memories needed to be tied to places, as local antiquarians understood, and the professionals in the MVHA incorporated such work. Whereas the AHA as an organization did not display an interest in the built environment, it was an important topic at the regional level. Several elements in the intellectual project of the MVHA flowed from this connection to the valley as a place, most important, historic sites work. There, the MVHA maintained an interest through to the 1940s; in 1947 it gained representation on the new National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings (later merged into the National Trust for Historic Preservation). Historical society representatives within the MVHA took the lead. Paine had President Orin Libby appoint a Committee on Historic Sites in 1909 to cooperate with local organizations in locating and marking such sites in the valley. There was a "unanimous and hearty endorsement of all present," though reporting did not begin immediately. By 1913 the committee had grown to twelve members; it cooperated with local historical groups such as chapters of the DAR, and it also commented on their work from an analytical perspective for the benefit of both patriotic societies and all members. A. H. Davison reported on Iowa for the 1920 meeting, noting that the DAR had "entered the field of marking 'Historic Spots' . . . with considerable vigor" in that state in 1903.⁴⁵

This early attention to historical sites merged with the work of the expanding national parks movement. Indeed the MVHA (unsuccessfully) called on the federal government to create a national park in 1917, but interest in promoting historical knowledge of and through the national parks accelerated in the late 1920s. Earlier, the National Park Service (NPS) had exhibited little interest in links with academic history, and little articulation of

⁴⁴ Lewis Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration: Report of a Survey Made at the Request of Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior*. . . . (Baltimore, 1928); Steven Crum, "Rare Exceptions: Some University Professors and the Teaching of Native American History, 1900–1970," *History Teacher*, 39 (Feb. 2006), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/39.2/crum.html>; Francis P. Weisenburger, "The Thirty-first Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 25 (Sept. 1938), 245; Elmer Ellis, "The Twenty-eighth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," *ibid.*, 22 (Sept. 1935), 231–50, 247; *Dictionary of American Scholars*, 494; Kellar, "Historian and Life," 3–4; Van Tassel and Tinsley, "Historical Organizations as Aids to History," 140–41; "Third Annual Meeting of the Association," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 3 (1909–1910), 21; "Report of Historical Museums Committee," with Orin Libby to Clarence Paine, March 24, 1915, file Committee Structure 1914–1915, box 1, Organization of American Historians Records; Charles E. Brown, "Minutes of Business Transacted at the Eleventh Annual Meeting," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 9, part 3 (1917–1918), 351; "The Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 8 (June 1921), 3–12.

⁴⁵ Bieber to Clarence Carter, Oct. 5, 1947, file 1947 B, box 36, Organization of American Historians Records; Clarence Paine to Alvord, March 1, 1910, file 1910 A–Cl, box 24, *ibid.*; Clarence Paine to Benjamin Shambaugh, Oct. 25, 1909, file 1909 Sham–SH, *ibid.*; Clarence Paine to Libby, Sept. 24, 1914, Committee Structure 1914–1915, box 1, *ibid.*; William Beer to Clarence Paine, Sept. 4, 1913, file 1913 B, box 25, *ibid.*; Executive Board, Historic Sites Reports, 1920, box 5, *ibid.*; A. H. Davison, "Historical Sites in Iowa," p. 5, *ibid.*

historical themes occurred in the service's work. That changed with the Great Depression and with the drive by Horace Albright, who became director in 1929, to develop sites of the colonial period and to raise the professionalism of the NPS in historical matters. The work commenced under Verne Chatelain, a history professor from Peru State Teachers College in Nebraska, who during the depression coordinated the use of NPS relief work to serve historical purposes. Chatelain, named first chief historian of the NPS in 1931, had ties to the MVHA as a member and as a co-worker of Theodore Blegen at the Minnesota Historical Society in the late 1920s.⁴⁶ Blegen reported enthusiastically to the MVHA in 1934 on the "many emergency work projects" that were "rich in such results as landmarks restored, battle areas developed, old roads rebuilt, and historical information systematized." Blegen found even more significant the attempt "to work out a national policy for historic sites and monuments." The *MVHR* carried many items on national parks in the 1930s and 1940s, after Chatelain had joined the service.⁴⁷ In 1942 the *MVHR* published W. Turrentine Jackson's history of the creation of Yellowstone National Park. In 1943 it ran a National Park Service position paper by Alvin P. Stauffer and Charles W. Porter that described historical areas managed by the NPS as "providing the outdoor or laboratory course for the study of American history." The tradition of interest in the Park Service continued after World War II. In 1947 the National Park Service chief historian Ronald F. Lee organized an annual meeting session titled "Historic and Prehistoric Rescue Work in the Missouri Valley." Academic and public historians participated in the discussion.⁴⁸

Interest in national parks expanded into environmental history. A valley is not only a place but also an environmental unit—a catchment area and an ecological system. That, of course, was not quite what the association's founders or the contributors to the MVHA's intellectual and political work on conservation had in mind, since they showed no knowledge of ecology, a science that came into prominence only much later. But environment did weigh on them heavily. They fashioned the West as an imagined space, but they also analyzed the physical place that the West was to them. Members developed this interest in an intellectual and political framework shaped not only by the National Park Service but also by the Progressive Era spirit of conservation of resources. Historians showed their political interest when they invited Ernest M. Pollard, a Republican

⁴⁶ "Minutes of Business Transacted," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 9, part 2 (1916–1917), 241–43; Charles B. Hosmer Jr., "Verne E. Chatelain and the Development of the Branch of History of the National Park Service," *Public Historian*, 16 (Winter 1994), 25–38; Theodore Blegen, "Some Aspects of Historical Work under the New Deal," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 21 (Sept. 1934), 200; "Historical News and Comments," *ibid.*, 15 (Dec. 1928), 429; Verne Chatelain, "Minnesota, the Federal Land Policy, and the Republican Party, 1855–1862," reported in "Historical News and Comments," *ibid.*, 18 (Dec. 1931), 448.

⁴⁷ Blegen, "Historical Work under the New Deal," 200; John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 1993), 177; Charles B. Hosmer Jr., *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926–1949* (2 vols., Charlottesville, 1981), II, 513. See, for example, Thomas M. Pitkin, review of *Romance of the National Parks* by Harlean James, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 26 (Dec. 1939), 448–49; Colin B. Goodykoontz, review of *Yellowstone National Park* edited by Hazel H. Voth and Carl P. Russell, *ibid.*, 27 (March 1941), 691–92; "Historical News and Comments," *ibid.*, 18 (Dec. 1931), 448.

⁴⁸ W. Turrentine Jackson, "The Creation of Yellowstone National Park," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 29 (Sept. 1942), 187–206; Alvin P. Stauffer and Charles W. Porter, "The National Park Service Program of Conservation for Areas and Structures of National Historical Significance," *ibid.*, 30 (June 1943), 25–48, esp. 48; W. Turrentine Jackson and David E. Russell, "Pioneers of Public History: Practicing Public History: A Conversation with W. Turrentine Jackson," *Public Historian*, 20 (Winter 1998), 20–48; Clarence S. Paine, "The Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 34 (Sept. 1947), 246–47. See also "Historical News and Comments," *ibid.*, 35 (Sept. 1948), 359.

congressman from Nebraska, to address the 1909 meeting on “Conservation of the Natural Resources of the Mississippi Valley.”⁴⁹

Members and the *MVHR* pioneered the study of the problems of American agriculture even before the establishment of the Agricultural History Society in 1919. In 1916 the journal published Louis B. Schmidt’s “The Economic History of American Agriculture as a Field of Study.” Most important, Herbert Kellar was a driving force in agricultural history throughout the 1920s and 1930s, speaking, for example, at the sixteenth annual meeting on state agricultural surveys. Conservation surfaced as a theme in a 1927 assessment of Theodore Roosevelt’s agriculture policies, but as with the national parks, national political developments linked to the New Deal spurred renewed interest in such matters as the exploitation of timber resources in the public domain. The *MVHR* also paid attention to the environmental problems of the dust bowl, American agriculture, and soil conservation policy. William O. Lynch’s 1939 presidential address noted that the farmers of the valley had used resources wastefully and had bequeathed environmental problems to the present. Discussing the importance of “conservation of natural resources for the benefit of future generations,” Lynch adopted New Deal-style rhetoric to attack the “greedy spirits” who exploited forests, eroded soils, and overgrazed “the natural grasses of vast stretches of semi-arid plains.” The annual meetings and the *Review* also addressed the issue of soil conservation in considering the work of Walter Prescott Webb on the Great Plains as an arid region. In the 1930s his interpretation offered a more environmentally focused alternative to the frontier thesis as an integrative framework for the Plains region.⁵⁰

Though none of this was modern environmental history, from within the inner councils of the *MVHA* came one link with that field’s future development. Theodore Blegen, an important figure in the association, helped found the Forest History Society in 1946, when he was dean of the University of Minnesota’s Graduate School. The initiative came from his interest in human settlement, use of resources, archives, and public history, themes amply demonstrated in the *MVHA* and its flagship organ. As *Forest History* noted, Blegen “conceived of a plan for systematically collecting and preserving the sources of forest history in the Lakes States.” He served on the Forest History Society’s executive committee and had two terms as its president.⁵¹ Although the society focused, not on ecological histories of forests, but on the timber industry’s efficient use of resources—and received important donations from the Weyerhaeuser Company—it eventually became allied to the American Society for Environmental History (founded 1977) in the production of their journal, *Environmental History*.

⁴⁹ Clarence Paine to Edgar R. Harlan, May 10, 1909, file 1909 C–H, box 24, Organization of American Historians Records; Ernest M. Pollard, “The Conservation of the Natural Resources of the Mississippi Valley,” *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 2 (1908–1909), 99–111. See also W. J. McGee, “The Conservation of Natural Resources,” *ibid.*, 3 (1909–1910), 361–79.

⁵⁰ Louis B. Schmidt, “The Economic History of American Agriculture as a Field of Study,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 3 (June 1916), 39–49; Earle D. Ross, “Roosevelt and Agriculture,” *ibid.*, 14 (Dec. 1927), 299–300, 307; Roy E. Appleman, “Timber Empire from the Public Domain,” *ibid.*, 26 (Sept. 1939), 193–208; Robert G. Caldwell, review of *The Great Plains* by Walter Prescott Webb, *ibid.*, 18 (March 1932), 581–83; Ernest L. Osgood, “Revised Viewpoints: The Great Plains,” *ibid.*, 23 (Sept. 1936), 250–51; John W. Caughy, “Criticism of the Critique of Webb’s *The Great Plains*,” *ibid.*, 27 (Dec. 1940), 442–44; Rupert N. Richardson, ed., “The ‘Summary Foreword’ of *The Future of the Great Plains*,” *ibid.*, 30 (June 1943), 49–68; Blegen, “Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 245–47; Shambaugh, “Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 124; Lynch, “Mississippi Valley and Its History,” 12.

⁵¹ Obituary for Theodore Blegen, *Forest History*, 13 (Oct. 1969), 3.

Transnational Themes

The geographical conception of the association allowed Americanists to work not only on the nation but also on the region's transnational connections. The MVHA in its early decades took an interest in Canada because it bordered on the Mississippi Valley and the Old Northwest and because the Great Plains extended across the two nations. The two countries' histories were intimately connected through common French and British occupation in the colonial period and cross-border flows of settlement as well as common physiographic features. Lawrence Burpee, a Canadian librarian who was later president of the Canadian Historical Association (1922–1925), served on the *MVHR* editorial board from 1916 to 1919. Nine articles on Canada appeared in the first six years of the *MVHR* because the journal had a commitment to formal surveys of historical societies, including those of Canada, until 1920. Thereafter the *Canadian Historical Review* took over this function for Canada, but the continuities of North American history remained a theme in MVHA programs and publications. As the “News and Comments” section in 1926 noted: “The strands of Mississippi Valley history lead frequently to Canada.”⁵²

In its first six years, the journal also covered the Hispanic borderlands, with four articles on Mexico. This was due in part to Isaac Cox, who was a founding member of the board of editors of the *Hispanic American Historical Review* (1918), besides serving as MVHA president in 1914–1915 and as a member of the board of editors of the *MVHR* for two terms. Several papers read before early annual meetings attacked U.S. foreign policy in Latin America and urged more sympathetic treatment of Mexico. Paul Peck of Grinnell College stressed “the importance of [colonial] Spanish influence upon the Mississippi Valley” and championed modern-day “appreciation of Pan-Americanism.”⁵³

The transnational potential came from the way life on the western frontier revealed connections to the wider world. Prominent themes were migration, transport, and the cotton and wheat economies. All testified to the valley's transnational ties. As the future *MVHR* editor Milo Quaife noted in 1919 about the founding of what became Minneapolis: “An American commonwealth—least of all one situated in the upper Mississippi Valley—is not a detached atom floating in boundless space; rather are its various component elements bound by innumerable ties to communities and peoples outside its borders.” To comprehend Mississippi Valley history, scholars must look beyond “legal bounds.”⁵⁴

Within the valley, the presence of immigrant groups helped strengthen the transnational orientation. The strength of Norwegian influence in Minnesota led to studies on the links between immigration and the Norwegian homeland. Theodore Blegen was a Guggenheim fellow in Norway in 1928–1929 and throughout his career worked on such topics as immigrant popular culture. He was a founder of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, which in the late 1920s developed a plan to cooperate with the National Society for District and Town History in Norway in collecting letters that would

⁵² Lawrence Burpee, “Historical Activities in Canada,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 2 (June 1915), 225–60; “Historical News,” *ibid.*, 13 (June 1926), esp. 132.

⁵³ Charles E. Chapman, “The Founding of the Review,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 1 (Feb. 1918), 8–23; Harris Gaylord Warren, “Isaac Joslin Cox, 1873–1956,” *ibid.*, 37 (Feb. 1957), 138; G. B. Winton, “The Present Situation in Mexico,” in “The Ninth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” by Beverley W. Bond Jr., *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 9, part 1 (1915–1916), 26–27; Isaac Cox, “The Mexican Problem: A Possible Peaceful Solution,” *ibid.*, 10, part 1 (1918–1919), 69–78; Paul Peck, “Latin-American History as a Field of Study for Mississippi Valley Students,” *ibid.*, 9, part 2 (1916–1917), 292–300.

⁵⁴ Milo Quaife, review of *Old Fort Snelling, 1819–1858* by Marcus L. Hansen, *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 8 (1918–1919), 248.

“throw light upon the emigration from Norway and upon the conditions in the settlements that were established in the New World.” Unearthed manuscripts were deposited in archives in Oslo, with copies secured by the Norwegian-American Historical Association. Blegen explained the project in a paper to the MVHA meeting in 1928, while the *MVHR* applauded this cooperative “hands across the sea” endeavor.⁵⁵

As part of its connection with museums and historical societies, the early MVHA also gave attention to the history of Native Americans. Though the frontier thesis is associated with a one-sided view of westward expansion, early MVHA meetings reveal an interest in Indian cultures that came from the presence of librarians, archaeologists, and ethnologists, as well as the personal memories of professional historians. Speakers such as James Mooney from the Bureau of American Ethnology addressed annual meetings; participating members visited archaeological exhibits; and the association as a body expressed alarm that Indian languages were disappearing. Though such activities tended over time to become segregated in specialized societies in which Indian prehistory became a separate subject, the connection was never entirely lost.⁵⁶

National History and Scientific History

Despite the transnational and nonnational hues in the work of the valley’s historians, the shift toward national historical themes was built into the MVHA from the time when academics became involved. Leading figures within the American historical profession who pursued the goal of scientific history allied that methodology to national history as a higher form of synthesis and attacked local antiquarianism. John Franklin Jameson, editor of the *American Historical Review*, thought local history inferior to an academic history that ought to be focused on national and international problems, and he hoped that the MVHA would steer local historians toward his hierarchical model of research. “Scientifically trained men,” Jameson hoped, would “find it possible, by a little exertion, to control the new movement” that the MVHA represented. Such a result was possible because Jameson and his university colleagues sent their graduates to work in the state historical societies and were reaping the benefits through new allies for the enterprise of professional and scientific history. Clarence Alvord, an ally in the pursuit of this objective, assured Jameson that the MVHA executive contained a majority in favor of “scholarly work.” He was instrumental in having the idea of “popularization” removed from the society’s draft constitution and hoped that the MVHA would “call to its aid the better trained men” in order to “control the state societies.”⁵⁷ Turner’s frontier thesis supplied a way that local history could be allied to this national project. Whenever he talked of the valley, Turner introduced the idea that historians of it were operating in the heart of the nation. A fundamental tension existed in the MVHA, therefore, between the Mississippi

⁵⁵ *Directory of American Scholars*, 80; Theodore Blegen, “State Historical Agencies and the Public,” *Minnesota History*, 9 (June 1928), 133–34; “Historical News and Comments,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 15 (Sept. 1928), 297–98.

⁵⁶ “First Annual Meeting of the Association,” *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 1 (1907–1908), 31; “Second Annual Meeting of the Association,” 18; “Minutes of Business Transacted,” *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 10, part 2 (1919–1920), 211; Hackett, “Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association,” 20.

⁵⁷ John Franklin Jameson to Alvord, Feb. 24, July 14, 1908, box 47, John Franklin Jameson Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.); Alvord to Jameson, Feb. 5, 1908, box 113, *ibid.*

Valley as a place in its own right and as the center of an expanding American republic, a theme of national focus.

The growing dominance of the national occurred (unevenly) between 1923 and 1944, as registered in the changing research program. The 1923 program suggested by the Minnesota Historical Society's Solon Buck, "The Progress and Possibilities of Mississippi Valley History," concentrated squarely on the valley. In contrast, the 1944 report of a committee headed by Louis Pelzer, "Projects in American History and Culture," an intellectual stocktaking done at the behest of the association, reflected the growing sense of nationalism associated with the wartime experience and the nation's rise to world power. It did not mention the Mississippi Valley as a topic. Though region did not disappear entirely, with writing on the Great Plains receiving treatment, the main focus was a set of national topics, especially the "American Mind" and its "improvableness." Agriculture was included, but "as a factor in American national life." The interest in conservation was undiminished, with entire sections given over to the need to study the conservation of resources, and the need to cooperate with historical agencies was still emphasized, along with history teaching and the recurrent need for "popularization" of history. But the emphasis was now almost entirely on how the local could contribute to the national.⁵⁸

National events strengthened the network of communications beyond the valley. By the end of the 1930s a debate about changing the name of the association to match changing national aspirations had already begun, and it reflected political and institutional forces promoting attachment to the nation-state. The *MVHR* took the name *A Journal of American History* as its subtitle in 1938. As William B. Hesseltine noted in 1940, "In response to a social need the association has grown to incorporate the entire field of American history." Paradoxically, part of this nationalizing process resulted from regionalism. In American society in the 1930s, study of the nation's regional and especially rural cultures increased, fostered by a search for roots in the maelstrom of the depression. The New Deal itself promoted programs to study rural and small-town culture. Those political developments gave the MVHA greater academic credibility in the nation as a whole precisely because of the link between the resurgence of regional culture and the national programs of the New Deal. For historians, the many New Deal legislative measures that aided historical production made history seem a more important subject when allied to the nation-state. The National Park Service, the Federal Writers' Project, and the Historical Records Survey won endorsement as actions of a federal government interested in preserving and valuing the nation's past. MVHA-aligned historians cooperated in compiling archival inventories for New Deal agencies, while William Lynch's 1939 presidential address was a strong personal endorsement of the political changes in attitudes toward government intervention in the economy.⁵⁹

The shifting relationships between academics and nonacademics favored growth of a nation-centered outlook from the mid-1920s onward. Within the MVHA academic membership grew at the expense of state and local historical societies as the universities of

⁵⁸ Buck, "Progress and Possibilities of Mississippi Valley History," 5–20; Pelzer et al., "Projects in American History and Culture," 508–9, 506–8, 522.

⁵⁹ Hesseltine, "Thirty-third Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association," 244; Aeschbacher, "Mississippi Valley Historical Association," 345; Caughey, "Under Our Strange Device," 534; Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991), 460, 464; Frederick Gutheim, "America in Guide Books," *Saturday Review of Literature*, June 14, 1941, p. 5; Blegen, "Historical Work under the New Deal," 200, 196, 198, 197; Lynch, "Mississippi Valley and Its History."

the valley region expanded their Ph.D. programs. Members with extensive public history backgrounds continued to participate prominently and on occasion served as presidents (in 1930–1931, 1937–1938, 1943–1944, and 1946–1947); they were professionalized functionaries in historical agencies. Those developments both spurred and reflected changes in scholarly specialization. In the 1930s state historians began the moves that led to the creation of their own specialized organization, the American Society for State and Local History, in 1940. Meanwhile, changes in academic specializations undermined the MVHA's regional distinctiveness by affirming the importance of national boundaries. Transnational aspects of MVHA work diminished as both Latin American and Canadian history gained separate scholarly outlets. While the *MVHR* had continued in the 1920s to take note of Latin American material, its "News and Comments" section depicted the field as a distinct specialization, labeling many "Latin American subjects" as "outside the field of United States history."⁶⁰

New patterns of scholarly networking further enhanced the focus on the nation. Though the majority of members and almost all of the leaders remained resident in the valley, that hardly excluded considerable exposure outside the region. By no means all MVHA presidents were trained entirely in the valley even before 1920. Some—such as Frederic L. Paxson (1916–1917), trained at the University of Pennsylvania, St. George L. Sioussat (1917–1918), at Johns Hopkins University, and Charles Ramsdell (1928–1929), at Columbia University—had East Coast degrees; Alvord, the *MVHR* editor, had an Illinois Ph.D. but had also done graduate study at Columbia and in Berlin. To such wider experience was added the national networking that came from employment and teaching practices. In the interwar period dozens of academics took advantage of improved transportation to teach more often and farther away from home in summer school positions to supplement their increasingly meager academic salaries; thereby members gained greater experience of the wider academic world, where they developed decidedly national networks. John D. Hicks's roots were in the valley in small-town Missouri and, after education at Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin, he started his career at Hamline University in Minnesota. By 1922–1923 he had spent a year at the University of North Carolina; from a teaching position in Nebraska from 1923 to 1932 he went to Wisconsin until he received a University of California, Berkeley, appointment in 1942. But he also taught at summer schools at Columbia, Northwestern, Syracuse University, the University of Minnesota, George Washington University, and the University of California, Los Angeles. In California he was to become an important agent for the growth of national American history, but without repudiating the importance of the American frontier or the midwestern experience.⁶¹

The wartime growth of the American state stimulated this national outlook. It provided opportunities for academics to serve the nation as historians in historical agencies established by the military and in civilian government. It also meant that American historians saw wide service across the Pacific and European war fronts, lectured at military war

⁶⁰ In the interwar years, 10 universities in the Mississippi Valley added Ph.D. programs in history, out of 46 institutions in the nation reporting programs. The number of history Ph.D.'s granted in all institutions grew by 83% from 1926 to 1930 alone. William B. Hesseltine and Louis Kaplan, "Doctors of Philosophy in History: A Statistical Study," *American Historical Review*, 47 (April 1942), 773–74; Tyrrell, *Historians in Public*, 222–26; Lester B. Shippee, ed., "News and Comments," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 9 (Sept. 1922), 180.

⁶¹ For biographical information, see Buck, "Clarence Walworth Alvord, Historian," 309; and Jacques Cattell, ed., *Directory of American Scholars: A Biographical Directory* (Lancaster, 1942), 641, 672, 762–63. John D. Hicks, *My Life with History: An Autobiography* (Lincoln, 1968), 117–19, 140–41.

college programs, and participated in wartime debates over the need to strengthen national history teaching in the high schools and to stimulate patriotism. All those things contributed to a rising sense of the importance of nation. Blegen's 1944 presidential address did not abandon regionalism, but it did stress "Our Widening Province" and the "bonds between valley and nation"; the address also urged promotion of U.S. history in schools and colleges. Blegen explicitly acknowledged the role of the war in highlighting the valley's history. Political decisions not only "swing the nation but, because of the nation's role in the world, are likely to be decisive far beyond our shores." For this reason, "Valley" history had taken on world-historical significance, since the region's historians now served "a people whose understanding and thought and action are profoundly significant to the present and future of mankind." It was during the war in 1944 that a committee led by Paul Angle of the Illinois State Historical Society sought to change the association's name to one reflecting the growing importance of national history in its work. But Clara Paine lobbied successfully for loyalty to regional roots.⁶²

This defeat for the innovators showed that even the momentous events of World War II were not quite enough to displace the MVHA's collective memory. Despite changing perspectives, the inherited traditions of the MVHA were strong, and its committee structure, which gave strong representation on the executive committee to past presidents, encouraged continuity. In the 1950s a battle raged within the MVHA over its name, which symbolically now meant, not strength and Progressive reform thought, but an intellectual and political narrowness reflected in the battles over desegregation of convention facilities in 1951–1952. As a special committee recommended, there was a ballot of members on a name change in 1951, for action in 1952, but 70 percent of voters opposed the change. John D. Barnhart of Indiana University took the lead against the proposal, arguing that the MVHA's "present character" should remain true to the "origin, purpose, and the place of residence of a majority of the members." Significantly, Barnhart believed that if the name changed, the association's "intimacy and friendly character" would be lost.⁶³ Not until 1959 did attempts seriously resume to effect the change, and not until 1964 did the membership vote "overwhelmingly" in favor. By then the association had grown from 1,470 members in 1947 to 3,119 in 1957 and over 6,000 in 1963. (Throughout this time, reports of membership numbers included institutional memberships, but the balance was shifting in favor of individuals, who by 1957 constituted 57 percent of all members. Only individual members voted on the name change.) The total membership was still disproportionately concentrated within the region. In 1951, 40 percent of the total members were resident in states completely outside the valley under the broadest possible interpretation of the concept defined by Alvord. Only when the growth of membership indicated by 1963 a near majority (48 percent) of members outside the region did a name change for both the journal and the association occur, in 1964 and 1965.⁶⁴

Since that time, the traditions and practices of the MVHA have become increasingly distant in historical memory. Selective professional remembering accelerated, with the older

⁶² Tyrrell, *Historians in Public*, 133–37, 185–95; Blegen, "Our Widening Province," 19, 20; Clark, "Our Roots Flourished in the Valley," 99, 100.

⁶³ Billington, "From Association to Organization," 82; Aeschbacher, "Mississippi Valley Historical Association," 346. For John D. Barnhart's statement, see "Historical News and Comments," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 38 (Sept. 1951), 352.

⁶⁴ Aeschbacher, "Mississippi Valley Historical Association," 347, 350. The membership numbers and distribution are calculated from "Historical News and Comments," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 38 (Sept. 1951), 370; and "Historical News and Comments," *ibid.*, 50 (Sept. 1963), 353.

association being condemned for its provincialism and racial bigotry, or more commonly forgotten, no longer perpetuated by the storytelling and social rituals that had survived into the 1950s. The annual meeting, which post–World War II was still sometimes held in relatively small communities such as Rock Island, Illinois (1948), and Madison, Wisconsin (1954), now convened, as Barnhart had feared, only in major metropolitan centers. The annual meetings grew more impersonal and the opportunities for social interaction they offered more fragmented, due in part to the weight of numbers, diminishing the sense of collective experience. Links with public historians did not revive until the 1980s when more sophisticated understandings of the role of historical consciousness emerged amid rising interest in place and popular memory. There were clearly losses as well as gains from the changes of the 1960s. Many understood the professional gains; Tom Clark understood the losses, as he obliquely indicated in an interview before his death in 2005.⁶⁵ The changes and their significance for the OAH can only be understood by attention to historical practice, and by the willingness of historians to engage self-reflexively with their own collective professional memory.

⁶⁵ Rebecca Sharpless, "An Interview with Thomas D. Clark," *OAH Newsletter*, 27 (Nov. 1999), <http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/99nov/clark.htm>.