EIGHTY years ago this society of scholars, now numbering more than
twelve thousand teachers, writers, and friends of history and steadily
growing, was brought into being by a handful of imaginative and creative
teachers. They were conscious of the gathering momentum of the revolution
in science. They would be the vanguard of a new and similar thrust under
the banners of reason. They would seek truth by a disciplined study of men
and institutions in their passage through time, as Darwin studied coral reefs.
The standards they raised and to which they swore allegiance were, of
course, as old as Herodotus and as explicit as Lucian of Samosata, who said
long ago:

The historian's one task is to tell the thing as it happened. . . . He may nurse some
private dislikes, but he will attach far more importance to the public good, and set
the truth high above his hate; he may have his favourites, but he will not spare

*Professor of history at Princeton University and editor of The Papers of Thomas Jefferson,
Mr. Boyd gave this presidential address at the Sheraton-Park Hotel, Washington, D. C., December
29, 1964.
their errors. For history, I say again, has this and this only for its own: if a man will start upon it, he must sacrifice to no God but Truth.¹

The oath of impartiality was as exacting as that of Sisamnes, and no doubt violated as often. But until three generations ago its enforcement among historians depended upon the individual conscience, a reliance most potent but both fortuitous and precarious. If a Goliath appeared in the form of an unassailable Macaulay, brooking no argument and thundering his Victorian imprecations against a Francis Bacon, prudent and practical men were apt either to keep silent or, worse, to echo the tirade. Only through chance could a David be expected to take the field. In this case a wise, gentle, and heroic David did come forth from almost the last place one would expect to find him—a government bureau—and did spend more than thirty years gathering and publishing all that was known of the writings and letters of the first statesman of modern science. The fact of least importance is that Goliath was demolished. All who value science and learning might indeed yield Macaulay a grudging expression of gratitude for his inadvertent spur to the advancement of knowledge. For surely no historical criticism, especially if intellectually ill-mannered, can ever have inspired a more fruitful harvest than that which aroused James Spedding to his selfless labors.² I cannot avoid here a parenthetic comment that is prompted by the misconception of many and by the particular expression of a distinguished predecessor on this platform.³ Great editing, as well as great history, must pass through one man’s mind.

But the task of the historian, as the founders of our community of scholars well understood, was too important to society to be left to fortune. The occasional Davids were valiant and inspired, but accidental and alone. The advancement of knowledge about men and institutions required sodality as well as solitude. Only thus could scholars bound by the same oath of alle-

² Catherine Drinker Bowen, Francis Bacon: The Temper of a Man (Boston, 1963), 16-17; The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon, ed. James Spedding (7 vols., London, 1861-74); The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. id. et al. (7 vols., London, 1857-59). Sir Leslie Stephen called the achievement of Spedding (1808-1881) "an unsurpassable model of thorough and scholar-like editing," a tribute that gains luster from its source, the Dictionary of National Biography.
³ Carl Bridenbaugh, "The Great Mutation," American Historical Review, LXVIII (Jan. 1963), 331. The misconception is natural, but, in view of what is taking place at present in the United States, its power to mislead should be noted. The training for scholarly editing stands today about where training for history stood at the time the profession was founded. Its highest achievements will very likely continue to be those of gifted and creative amateurs, such as Spedding, Wilmarth Lewis, Edmond Samuel de Beer, and others, until misconceptions about it are removed and especially until its accidental and newly established position in the academic world creates less unease and attracts more professional rewards and incentives. But this will depend upon an understanding of its nature and its requirements.
giance to truth and impartiality achieve the power, the discipline, and the humility essential to the realization of the great object. The noble dedication by William Harvey of his *An Anatomical Disquisition on the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals* had made the point two and a half centuries earlier. True philosophers, Harvey said to his colleagues of the Royal College of Physicians,

never suffer their minds to be warped by the passions of hatred and envy, which unfit men duly to weigh the arguments that are advanced in behalf of truth, or to appreciate the proposition that is fairly demonstrated; neither do they think it unworthy of them to change their opinion if truth and undoubted demonstrations require them to do so; nor do they esteem it discreditable to desert error, though sanctioned by the highest antiquity; for they know full well . . . that many things are discovered by accident, and that many may be learned indifferently from any quarter, by an old man from a youth, by a person of understanding from one of inferior capacity.4

The trace of austerity in Lucian, urging the historian to stand independent and aloof, detached from all bonds to persons and states and indeed to life, finds no echo in the words of Harvey. A chastening glimpse of the subjective barriers had brought humility but no lessening of the love of truth. Association and communication among men of learning were as essential to discovery, whether disciplined or accidental, as systematic investigation. In 1803 a young American, Samuel Miller, put a discerning finger on the now obvious fact that the remarkable multiplication of academies and learned associations in the preceding century "ought to be considered as holding a place among the most important sources of modern improvements in science."5

The revolution in science could never be reversed. It helped to create and in turn was given a new thrust by another sort of revolution that occurred in 1776. The most ardent and consistent exemplar of that revolution saw the integral nature of science, history, and liberty more clearly than any of the other heirs of Bacon, Newton, and Locke: "while the art of printing is left to us," Thomas Jefferson declared in that doubtful decade when the right to oppose was being challenged, "science can never be retrograde; what is once acquired of real knowledge can never be lost. To preserve the freedom of the human mind then and freedom of the press, every spirit should be ready to devote itself to martyrdom; for as long as we may think as we will, and speak as we think, the condition of man will proceed in improvement."6

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6 Thomas Jefferson to William Green Munford, June 18, 1799, *Thomas Jefferson Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Columbia University, Teachers College Library.
author of the Declaration of Independence conceived the task of the historian much as William Jovanovich has defined the task of his indispensable ally, the publisher—as "a primarily civilizing enterprise and like orderly government... central to a humanistic society. Its great import lies in the maintenance of freedom." A nation that claims to be in earnest about defending its liberty is bound thereby to be serious about its history. A solemn duty rests upon it to provide the best possible climate in which the truth in history, as in science, can be sought and cherished, a duty demanding all the resources that an enlightened and powerful people can summon. It is one that ought to be faced in the spirit of generosity and magnanimity out of which the concept of liberty itself originates, but at all events the simple requirements of self-government demand that it be met.

If anyone engaged in this revolution in history was innocent enough to believe that the revelation of truth about a people’s past would be accepted as calmly as Harvey’s discovery of the circulation of the blood, the thunder and lightning aroused by Darwin should have opened his eyes. This, however, was a gentle admonition. Science had faced many formidable battles over the centuries before attaining its unchallenged position of power and opulence. But these were as nothing compared with those against which the vanguard of a revolution in history and their followers would have to contend. Old myths, ancient hatreds, and all the inherited fears and frustrations that put nation against nation were not only mounting in intensity but now had the results of the progress of science to multiply their menacing aspects. For after the transforming event of 1776, Everyman indeed felt competent to be his own historian in all that mattered in politics and society. Thus what mattered most in the past was bound to enter the present as controversy. Not even biology could encounter or continue to encounter the barriers that history would always be obliged to face. Facing these was in fact its primary function. Its duty was to confront, not to reinforce, a misleading mythology based on sentimentality or shallow patriotism.

At the beginning of the third quarter of the nineteenth century it was quite clear to thoughtful American scholars that on the frontiers of history there were forests to be cleared, trees to be girdled, and boulders to be removed. Textbooks by which youth were to be prepared for the great responsibility of citizenship in a democracy were wretched amalgams of piety, parochialism, and misinformation. Their horizons ended too often at state or sectional boundaries. If they ever spanned the Atlantic at all, it was to indulge in attitudes of self-righteousness or in the cruder displays of manifest destiny,

never to link American institutions and ideals to the great tradition of civility stretching back through many ages to many lands whence both our people and our fundamental precepts of law, justice, and administration were all derived. From these handbooks of chauvinism, students recited to teachers almost as unqualified as themselves. For even in the universities, so one of the founders of the American Historical Association declared, history received "only such charitable attention as could be given it by some benevolent professor after his energies had already been too much exhausted by the absolute necessities of what was thought to be more important instruction." Less than a score of American colleges had teachers of history, and these were rarely productive scholars. Of five eastern universities in 1882, so J. Franklin Jameson stated thirty years ago, only one had a professor of history, "three were thinking of acquiring one, and the fifth was, to all appearance, not even thinking of it."

The indispensable task of preserving and publishing the documentary sources had been borne altogether by zealous amateurs, singly or in the meagerly supported institutions that they founded for the purpose. Historical societies in less than a century had accomplished much, but the few that existed tended more and more to become social organizations, havens of genealogists, or sanctuaries for superannuated clergymen. National and state archives had also been preserved in surprising quantity, despite some irreparable and shameful losses, but the professional archivist was even more distant on the horizon than the professional historian. No historical journals save those of a local, genealogical, or antiquarian nature existed. Criticism was left chiefly to The Atlantic Monthly, The North American Review, and The Nation. President Eliot of Harvard summed up the matter in an address at Johns Hopkins University in 1882 describing the relative attention given to various subjects in American colleges and universities. He illustrated his point with the story of two young scholars of promise who had asked his advice about preparing themselves to become professors of history.

"I was obliged to tell them," said he, "that under existing circumstances it would be the height of imprudence."

But the revolution was already under way.

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 2. Charles Eliot's address may well have inspired Daniel Coit Gilman to suggest the formation of the American Historical Association, a suggestion with which Jameson credits him and one confirmed in a letter from Clarence W. Bowen to Herbert B. Adams, Nov. 24, 1900. ("Historical Scholarship in the United States, 1876-1900: As Revealed in the Correspondence of Herbert B. Adams," ed. W. Stull Holt, The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Ser. LVI, No. 4 [Baltimore, 1938], 288.) But it was Adams who created the Association and made it possible.
way, and its undoubted leader was Herbert Baxter Adams of the university where Eliot spoke.

For half a century after 1876 two towering figures were at the center of that revolution, planning its strategy, training its battalions, calling attention to weaknesses here and bolstering defenses there, exhorting, inspiring, executing, and leading. Adams more than any other person was responsible for transferring the custody of historical scholarship in the last quarter of the nineteenth century from the hands of the amateurs and the antiquarians to those of the academicians. In that brief span of years he sent forth from his seminar to all parts of the nation a succession of graduate students disciplined in the use of the sources, ready to meet on the ground of reason and truth the shallow, pietistic, and provincial forces that had so long misused the banners of history. Adams himself looked upon each student placed on the faculty of a college in the West or the South as a new colony planted, and, in language appropriate to an age of imperialism, took just pride in the remarkable expansion of his own colonial system of the intellect. The simile was less apt than that of a band of missionaries. For it is impossible to read the letters of teacher and students without sensing that aspect of mission in our national character which Frederick Merk has described with such candor and quiet eloquence in his *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*. One teacher trained by Adams founded an academic historical society in a small sectarian college in North Carolina, began a scholarly historical publication, and at the close of the century reported to his old preceptor much as a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts might have done in the colonial period. “Last night,” he said, “I made [a] talk on our historical ideal. I spoke of the freedom of thought in the history department of this college and of the obligation laid on us for a revival of ideas. I appealed to the boys to let it be so that our society would be at least one place in all the South in which a man could present his opinions of our history and get a respectful hearing. At this point they cheered. I think we are making progress.”

But the revolutionary crusade was bound for trouble because it aimed at the center of the target: the history of political and social institutions. When another teacher in the South used a text on constitutional history so bland that it had first appeared in an encyclopedia, the local newspaper, appropriately named *The Banner*, waved the Confederate flag for two columns and

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asked at the top of its voice why Alexander Stephens' *Constitutional View of the War between the States* was not good enough. Those on the perimeter in these opening skirmishes of the revolution wrote anxious letters to Adams appealing for the aid and counsel that seemed inexhaustible. But there at the center, too, the distant rumble of thunder was heard. Adams' own university formally declared that “the discussion of current political, economic, financial and social questions ... is of such importance that the lessons should be given only by the ablest and wisest persons” and recommended great caution in the selection and engagement of the faculty.\(^\text{13}\)

These were the natural consequences of revolution. Considering that in reality its aim was central to the defense of liberty, that it sought an understanding of the past in order to fit men for a better understanding of themselves and their institutions, the surprising fact is that the casualties and the lost battles were so few. One casualty declared before the century closed that “the way to help the Negro in the South is to educate the White Man,”\(^\text{14}\) and it would be easy to conclude in the light of tragic events that the war had been lost, that Professor James Silver’s address before the Southern Historical Association and his *Mississippi: The Closed Society* are measures of the defeat.\(^\text{15}\) No discerning student of history is likely to make such an error. The fact that the address was given before a learned body founded in consequence of the revolution originating in a quiet seminar room in Baltimore is eloquent testimony to its progress, not to its failure. It is indeed a measure of the importance of history to society. However much the historian might deplore the tragic wastes and cruelties, the affronts to national character, the endless failures to heed warnings from the past, or the limited range of his own voice in a strident world, he is bound to be the last to lose hope in the ultimate value of the revolution of which he is a continuing representative.

For what Adams, his students, and others had accomplished in this brief quarter of a century was much more than the establishment of a profession. What they had really done was to challenge a way of looking at the past that was unworthy of a free society. Thenceforth, though historians themselves might at times be so blinded by human frailty as, in Harvey’s words, “to deny the light of the noonday sun,” the past would be looked at with candor, with reason, with dignity, and with respect for truth. Those elements of national character that evoked just pride or elevated feelings or moral judgments

\(^{13}\) Minute of June 4, 1894, adopted by the trustees of Johns Hopkins University, *ibid.*, 227. The date is suggestive.

\(^{14}\) Bassett to Adams, Dec. 16, 1898, *ibid.*, 261 (italics in original).

were by no means to be excluded, but neither were the faults to be obscured or covered with gloss. Since defense of liberty is the central function of a free society, the public good required that those in office be held accountable. So, too, the historian himself was to be subjected to the most rigid rules of accountability. A profession now existed to insist that the records used by one should be open and accessible to all, that the historian should be held accountable by those most competent to do it—his own peers. This was a way of looking at history that comported with the dignity of free men, a way of strengthening democracy as only the truth could strengthen it.

If the period when the revolution began was the Age of Adams, the next quarter of a century was indisputably the Age of Jameson. What is impressive about both periods is the vitality, the drive, and the range of leaders who encompassed responsibility on every level, both to the public at large and to the world of learning. As Adams and his growing empire engaged in the Chautauqua movement and extension courses, so Jameson and his associates endeavored to breathe new life into the historical societies. This was so successfully done through annual conferences and more informal means that the foundation of a national association for the purpose was a natural consequence. The sense of mission led Jameson to carry the banner even to the hereditary and patriotic societies, the heart of what many regarded with some reason as enemy territory. The nearest outpost was overcome so successfully that one national patriotic society to its lasting credit was induced to sponsor a series of documentary publications of high scholarly merit. The *American Historical Review*—still the only journal of history in the world devoted to a comprehensive coverage of all phases of history—was launched. *Writings on American History* was begun as a means of keeping the profession abreast of its steadily increasing productivity, and the extensive publications of American historical societies in the preceding century were similarly brought into focus. Archives on the national, state, and local levels were examined and described, and a movement was begun for the establishment of a national archives system. This, an enduring monument to Jameson’s unflagging zeal, was realized half a century after the first advocacy of the idea. Within another quarter of a century there came into being an archival profession having its own body of doctrine, its own journal, and its own national association. To this movement Jameson linked the idea of a national historical publications commission such as Great Britain had established in 1800, France and Belgium in 1834, and Austria, Hungary, Italy, Russia, Japan, and other nations at later dates. “All governments that care for public enlightenment and seek to promote intelligent patriotism,”
he declared, "do this. The Government of the United States ... has never had a general, broadly conceived, systematic plan, and it has never had any regular, organized means of bringing expert historical opinion to bear on the question what enterprises ought to be undertaken and how each should be accomplished." In the present year, three-quarters of a century after the first call for such a measure of enlightened economy, there was passed by the Congress of the United States and signed by the President the first act to provide the National Historical Publications Commission with resources moderately adequate to its great responsibilities. But the failure to accomplish this in his own lifetime did not daunt Jameson. If one set of coals refused to burst into flame, he blew on another, or on several, and from these he lit many torches. By his insistent endeavors with government, universities, publishers, patriotic societies, and private philanthropy, he, more than any other individual, was responsible for providing the solid foundation of guides, calendars, bibliographies, and scholarly editions of historical documents that enabled the new profession to face its duty of promoting the public enlightenment.

Adams and Jameson were quite aware, as every historian is, that the labors of many devoted men and women within the profession and the generosity of many others beyond its boundaries made it possible for them to lead this remarkable revolution at the end of the last century and the beginning of ours. The success they achieved is witnessed on every hand—in our multiplying libraries, in the quality of our historical literature, in the standards of criticism applied to it, in the several national, regional, and specialized associations of scholars deriving from what they founded, in the vast complex of the national and state archival systems, and, most important of all, in the information available to youth in schools, colleges, and universities throughout the land. In many other tangible and intangible ways, not least of which is the growing number of men in public office who have studied or taught history, this revolution has, for all of its failures and frustrations, contributed mightily to the public good.

The leaders of this revolution saw one thing very clearly. The historical profession needed to be centered in the capital of the nation. It belonged there even more imperatively than the chronicler in other centuries needed to be next to the monarch, not merely because the archives and libraries drew it there by their magnetic power, not merely because government and

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history dealt with common concerns arising from the past, but also because, embracing every other area of knowledge about the past, the profession could not avoid its obligation to look first at government. This stemmed directly from the American Revolution and the Enlightenment with their proposition that the organization, the procedures, and the policies of government should be open to rational inquiry and independent criticism—a process that has had deep effect on our whole constitutional system.\textsuperscript{17} Nothing could have been more symbolically appropriate, therefore, than that the American Historical Association should have become the only learned society to hold its charter from the Congress of the United States.

It was in 1887 that Herbert Baxter Adams urged Frederick Bancroft, then in Paris, to return, settle down, and contribute to \textit{The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science}, that series whose title tells so much and whose volumes inspired so many. "I have a great scheme afoot," Adams concluded, "for fostering historical and political studies in America and I think you will find Baltimore and Washington the best vantage-ground for public and private good."\textsuperscript{18} This may well have been the first hint of a solution to one growing problem of which the founders of the profession were quite cognizant, but which they failed to solve. When they achieved so much, we cannot reproach them for this one conspicuous failure. It required half a century to establish a national archives system, three-quarters of a century to make a national historical publications program viable, and we are now approaching the end of a century with this problem still unsolved. It is a reproach to us as a profession and to our society as a whole that this long-neglected task has not been pursued with vigor and determination. For this is a problem whose adverse effects are mounting daily, both for the profession and for the national interest. It is to this problem and its solution that I wish to draw your attention—the task of providing at the capital of the nation a center for historians and for historical study in all of its vast ramifications that will be worthy of the dignity of the discipline and of its fundamental importance to the culture of a free society.

Proposals to meet this need go back to the beginning of the century and arose out of the growing number of graduate students being sent to Washington from the various colonies that Adams had planted. The first actual proposal seems to have been made one spring evening in 1901 by Frederick Jackson Turner to J. Franklin Jameson and Charles H. Haskins as the mem-


\textsuperscript{18} Adams to Bancroft, Apr. 6, 1887, "Historical Scholarship in the United States," ed. Holt, 100.
bers of that potent triumvirate of the historical world sat on Turner's veranda. As Jameson later recalled, the proposal was primarily to create "an abiding place in Washington for graduate students in American history, temporarily released from universities for a period of research in Washington archives." A Committee to Consider a School of American Historical Studies—"a sort of American School in Washington, like the American School in Rome," Andrew C. McLaughlin called it—was forthwith appointed by the Council of the Association. The concept was soon expanded to include the whole problem of promoting historical research in general. But the creation of the Carnegie Institution of Washington the next year deflected the idea. An appeal was made to that foundation without success; the undertaking lay beyond its boundaries. So, too, did its historical enterprises, but this was only discovered a quarter of a century after Jameson had used that aegis to lay a solid foundation for American historical scholarship. The proposition to create a center for historical studies was, as Jameson said to Turner at the time, "reinvented" by a professor at Princeton. This resulted in a meeting in New York attended by a dozen or more of the outstanding leaders of the profession at which, as one can detect without penetrating very far between the lines, there was some apprehension that the proposed center might become a Gothic establishment with students wearing academic gowns and listening to Latin grace at dinner. A special committee was appointed, and on its recommendation the Council of the Association approved a plan "for establishing in Washington a residential center for higher studies in history, economics, and political science to be under the control of those departments of the various universities contributing to the support of the Center." This seemed a distinct advance, for here was frank recognition that every university providing for advanced instruction in these important areas had a vital stake in facilitating the research carried on by its students at the national capital and would be invited to join in a condominium for that purpose. But even before the war suspended the plan, Jameson spoke somewhat wistfully of it as a "movement for a Christian Home for Historical Orphans in Washington." The waste, the handicaps, the ineffi-

19 Jameson to Turner, May 10, 1916, J. Franklin Jameson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Walter Rundell, Jr., for his kindness in searching the Jameson Papers and the files of the Association for the development of the idea of such a center. I am also indebted to members of the staff of the Massachusetts Historical Society for examining the papers of Senator George F. Hoar, who steered the charter of the Association through Congress, and of Justin Winsor, whose papers are rich in information about the state of historical scholarship in the late nineteenth century.

20 Jameson to Andrew C. McLaughlin, May 22, 1916, ibid.

ciencies continued for scholars young and old as they faced the formidable archives and libraries of Washington.

After the war there was a brief revival of the plan. A misconceived University Center was produced on paper, depending for its operation on a group of experts who agreed to volunteer their services when required by scholars carrying on research in Washington. The director of the American Council on Education pledged the good offices of that organization for transacting what he called "the very simple business of the Center."22 The business turned out to be even more simple than he had imagined. Early in 1922 a young lady from the University of Iowa duly registered at the office of the so-called center. Quite predictably, she was referred to Jameson as chairman of its voluntary historical division. "No earnest student of history has ever turned up," Jameson ruefully admitted the next year, "except... our one ewe lamb, for whom we were able to do so little."23 The fact is that the plan was unworkable. It was a center only in name, indeed worse than none, for it added to the difficulties it sought to solve. Graduate students quickly saw that it was easier to write or go directly to Jameson, who in his own person was a center for all phases of historical research in the United States. Yet even in its short life and happy dissolution this variation of the concept offers an instructive lesson that cannot be disregarded. This is that the problem cannot even be touched, much less solved, unless there is first of all brought into existence a three-dimensional embodiment of the idea, together with almost all facilities required for promoting historical research save the original sources themselves. A building adequate in size, suitable in accommodations, designed in all of its functions to meet the necessities of a growing problem is the absolute precondition to its success. The mistake that was made a generation ago, however generous and well-meant, stands as a solemn warning. Neither the dignity of the profession and of the institutions of higher learning that it represents nor the importance of its endeavors to society should again be compromised by an ill-advised and misdirected sense of economy. The historical profession should not again seek the establishment of a home for historical orphans, but rather declare the urgent

22 This plan was approved by the Council at its meeting of December 28, 1920. (Files of the American Historical Association, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Samuel P. Capen, director, American Council on Education, to Gilbert Grosvenor, May 11, 1922, Jameson Papers.) The plan as developed by William F. Willoughby is set forth in Willoughby's letter to L. S. Rowe, president of the American Political Science Association, undated but alluded to in a covering letter from Rowe to Jameson, September 23, 1921. (Ibid.)
need of creating here a seat worthy alike of the muse of history and of the nation.

World-wide depression and war again suspended all efforts to meet the need, and all the while its dimensions vastly increased. About a decade ago Professor Boyd C. Shafer brought the matter forward once more. Few if any were in a better position than the Executive Secretary of the Association to see the growing magnitude of the long-standing problem. Various other scholars called for a solution, and this time the seed began to germinate. In 1963 proposals on this and related matters were referred by the Council to a special committee of which Professor W. Stull Holt was chairman. Last May the report of this committee stating the need and outlining the functions of a national center for historical study in Washington was laid before the Executive Committee of the Council. No one was left with any illusions as to the magnitude of the undertaking. “This proposal,” Professor Holt declared, “calls for a major effort, for imagination, for careful planning, for much study, and for continuous and united work.”

The Executive Committee gave its unanimous approval, and within two weeks a special committee it had authorized, representing various parts of the country and different areas of history, met in Washington to develop plans and to chart the campaign for their realization. The work of this committee continues, and its results will in due time be brought before the profession and the public. I, for one, believe that the call made by Professor Holt for a continuous, imaginative, and united effort may well turn out to be the most important purpose to be defined for the profession since the days of Adams and Jameson.

Even now, in the light of events of the past half century, it seems fortunate that the plans of 1901 and 1916 proved abortive. For the profession today stands at a time and place of which the leaders of that day, wise and concerned as they were, cannot have dreamed. Their plans were conceived in another world, before the transforming era of the great wars, before the breakdown of colonialism and the multiplication of new nations, before the revolutionary advance of the machine lifted old burdens from the backs of men and placed new ones on their consciences and on their capacity to refashion obsolescent institutions, before the United States was required to protect its own and others’ security while defending all that was vital in the tradition to which it belongs. To some these cataclysmic changes seem to have set so wide a gulf between our world and that of half a century ago as to make the discipline of history irrelevant and meaningless because the past

seems to have no lessons, no laws, no structure. This, in my opinion, is a profoundly mistaken view. It flies in the face of one of the most obvious facts about history—its almost unbroken continuity. The race of man is still the race of man, inheritor of primordial propensities for good and evil. The myths, the prejudices, the hatreds, the ignorance, the provincialism, and the unenlightened patriotism against which Adams, Jameson, and other founders of the profession struggled in that other world are still with us, their power to obstruct and to mislead multiplied to an incalculable degree by the very factors that separate us from that seemingly distant age. But other and countervailing inheritances from the past are still with us also: the humanistic tradition to which history alone, in its broadest sense, provides a means of access and upon which we must ultimately rely if life in this new world is to be worth living. When we were a pioneering nation on the outer fringes of Western civilization, we remembered far more of our deep past, sought its elevated vantage point more assiduously, and better understood its relevance to the concept of self-government than we do now. This should warn us. A nation that has taken the place of Rome cannot afford this dangerous detachment from the roots that go well beyond Rome.

History is now, because of this very fact, a more urgently needed discipline than ever before, not to provide men with dogmas and laws, but to give them the best available perspective for the appalling responsibilities of citizenship in this new and uncharted world. This is the great challenge to the profession, and to meet it there is need for a rebirth of the zeal, of the feeling of unity, and of the sense of mission such as characterized its early days. In meeting this challenge the first requirement is a capitol for history in which the youngest graduate student can begin to find his way in association with the seasoned veteran and in which the ideals of the historian can be made manifest and transmitted from one generation to another in countless ways, formal and informal, accidental and purposeful. We cannot in this new world revive Jameson's *historicum convivium* or Putnam's Round Table, but what these informal centers of Attic discourse did in setting standards, in strengthening bonds of unity, and in creating a sense of continuity and of purpose is more urgently needed by the profession now than ever before.

Washington is now the political capital of the world to which all roads lead. The explosive growth of historical scholarship in more than a hundred institutions of higher learning throughout the nation, the sudden penetration of fields of knowledge and areas hitherto neglected, the remarkable growth of interest shown by other countries in American history, the reali-
zation on the part of government, philanthropy, and the business community that disciplined study of the roots of problems is necessary both to their solution and to the avoidance of costly mistakes, the enormous expansion in archival and library collections, the availability of many tools of scholarship hitherto unavailable—these and many other factors have multiplied the number of scholars drawn to Washington from all parts of the world to a degree that few fully realize. This expansion of historical scholarship is accelerating. A generation ago when scholars flocked to London from all parts of the British Empire, the responsibility for providing a center for the promotion of historical scholarship was met by the establishment of the Institute of Historical Research in London. All who have enjoyed its facilities, used its library, or received counsel from its able staff can testify to the economies of time and energy that it has effected in its increasingly useful life. Different but comparable institutions have long existed in Paris, Berlin, Athens, Rome, and elsewhere, making smooth the path of the young student who is often insufficiently trained, sometimes unfamiliar with the most obvious resources of scholarship, and frequently handicapped by language and other barriers. They have also provided a useful and indeed essential base of operations for the mature scholar. A comparable service to scholarship is rendered by International House in Tokyo, created by American philanthropy. But in Washington, capital of the most affluent nation in history, no such intellectual crossroads exists to meet the needs of wayfaring scholars. Graduate students and seasoned veterans alike who come here from this and many other countries have no place to live and associate with others of like purpose, no staff of experts to advise them how to take advantage of the incomparable library and archival materials, no guidance or assistance beyond that arising out of accident or the generosity of those already overburdened with other tasks. The need to remedy this glaring defect on the cultural landscape of a great capital is overwhelming, is long overdue, and is increasing in dimension with every passing year.

Granting all of this, many difficult questions arise. What services and facilities would such a national center for historical scholarship provide? To whom would these be available? Under what aegis should it be established and how governed? How and to what extent should it be financed? Each of us will have his own appropriate answer to these and other questions, and we shall all have to be guided by the studies now being carried on by the special committee and such others as the Council may authorize. If I may hazard my own view, based largely on what seems to be the consensus derived from the preliminary discussions, I should say most emphatically
that the center should be available to all serious scholars of whatever place or station who make use of the historical approach to knowledge. Its canons of admission should be almost if not quite as catholic as history itself. It may surprise some but it should not be forgotten that at its birth the American Social Science Association stood *in loco parentis* to the American Historical Association. To the extent that those in the social sciences wish or need to make use of the historical method, such a center should not only welcome them but do everything possible to encourage so salutary a tendency. Nor should it by any means confine its services to those trained exclusively in the normal academic disciplines. History has back of it a longer and prouder line of amateurs than perhaps any other profession. These, happily, will always be with us. They are growing more numerous, and their scholarly writings often put those of the professional to shame. The profession will always need the zeal, the compassion, the concern for meticulous accuracy, and the literary style of a Catherine Drinker Bowen, as it will often need her slings and arrows.

It seems most logical that a national center to promote historical study should be founded under the aegis of the organization that speaks for the historical profession, particularly in view of the fact that its domain embraces art, literature, science, politics, and most other areas of human endeavor. On practical grounds, the fact that the American Historical Association derives its charter from the federal government and is legally competent to own property and to manage trusts makes it appropriate that such a center should be founded by it. Even so, I myself should hope that the governing board of the center would include representatives of those institutions of learning in Washington and elsewhere with whose interests those of historical scholarship are inevitably intermingled—the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the National Gallery of Art, the National Portrait Gallery that will soon be established on a foundation of solid iconographical and biographical scholarship, and, of course, the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council. I should hope that it might also include those of far vision—"men of universal spirit," William Penn called them—who could speak for the public interest in a way that even historians may not always speak.

In developing the plans for such a national center, we shall be able to profit from the experience of other countries, but I should hope that we would heed Professor Holt's advice to plan with imagination and courage, utilizing the best of what has been done elsewhere but enlarging upon that to meet new needs and new opportunities. No such instrument of scholarship could ever hope to meet its primary responsibilities without providing
suitable living quarters for scholars, an adequate library of reference works, guides, calendars, and indexes, as well as conference rooms, dining facilities, and other necessities and amenities. It should, of course, be the headquarters of the historical profession, and one of its most prominent features should be that agency of growing usefulness by which universities seeking new talent and young scholars seeking positions might achieve their proper ends in an atmosphere of dignity and calm instead of demeaning each other, the profession, and the colleges and universities they represent by the unworthy process that now inevitably takes place under chaotic conditions at our Annual Meetings. A place of dignity and quiet, where learning stands manifest on every wall and where scholars of all ages could meet and exchange views at any time of the year rather than during three frenetic days and nights of frustration, might do more than anything else to elevate the profession and tighten the bonds of unity that have been so noticeably slipping. It could not eliminate this condition of which we are all aware, but it could do much to smooth its harsh edges and soften its unintended cruelties.

Such an instrument for the advancement of learning in an area vital to the public good would amply justify itself if it did no more than to enable scholars of diverse origin from all parts of the world to live and converse together about common purposes during their periods of research in Washington; if it did no more than to provide facilities desperately needed to curtail the drastic levies in time and money upon scholars and their institutions alike because of the lack of such an institution; if it did no more than to stand, as some day it must, as an imposing architectural witness before the world, declaring by its physical presence that a free society cherishes the disciplined study of the past as much as it cherishes its monuments, its historic sites, its restorations, and all of its other evocations of its progress toward greatness, to which both government and philanthropy have properly, if sometimes inadvisedly, made available hundreds of millions of dollars. A nation that did not so cherish the monuments of such a rise to greatness as those at Quincy and Mount Vernon and Monticello would be ill-suited to sustain its place of leadership among the nations. But when Thomas Jefferson spoke of "these precious Monuments of our history," he thought first of all of manuscripts and books such as those he spent a lifetime gathering and finally made available to the government as the foundation of what is now the largest body of intellectual resources in the world. It is to these and other great accumulations of monuments of our culture that scholars will come in increasing numbers, and their need for a gateway to such treasures of the mind and spirit will increase in like manner.

But a center designed to promote historical scholarship would fail to
reach its highest potentialities if its role were merely passive. An obligation would rest upon it and its governing body, it seems to me, to endeavor to stimulate historical investigation along the endless frontiers of history throughout the United States and the world. I should hope that through it the profession would face this responsibility with creative zeal, for most assuredly the world will judge both this proposal and the profession that sponsors it by the manner in which its aims and functions are conceived. It should chart new areas to explore, point to old ones too long neglected. It should speak plainly and pay little heed to the astonishing counsel recently advanced that research has reached the point of diminishing returns. But it should also look inward and ask whether, in our preoccupation with the monograph and in our fashioning of the rewards and incentives of scholarly endeavor, we are today training scholars for tasks beyond the range of a single individual; whether we are leaving to others trained in other specialties the performance of tasks once a part of the historian’s duty; whether, when we place the latest of the multiplying collections of monographs under general editorship beside the great cooperative achievement of Justin Winsor’s Narrative and Critical History, we can truly say which has made the greater contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

Great plans are, of course, now being greatly conceived. One of the most impressive of recent years is concerned with the history of an area and a people who may well decide the shape of the future. Two years ago a few farsighted historians and social scientists brought forth a plan based upon the proposition clear to every student of history that an understanding of China is among the most urgent intellectual and practical challenges now confronting mankind, a challenge bound to become increasingly urgent. They pointed out that no other civilization is so fully documented for the entire period of its history; that no other history, in proportion to its massive historical literature, has been so little explored; that, while Chinese scholarship for millenniums had produced great works in textual criticism and philology, the work of historical analysis and synthesis had scarcely begun; and that the greatest need for anyone concerned with any aspect of this ancient civilization, as all must be soon or late, is a comprehensive exposition of the whole span of Chinese history according to modern standards of scholarship. Such is only one example of the kind of responsibility for stimulating historical investigation in all areas that will almost inevitably fall upon those who inhabit this capitol of scholarship that, like the political capital from which it cannot properly be separated, has ramifications now extending throughout the world. Many other great enterprises press upon us, large and small, demanding to be undertaken.
This brings me to the final point of cost. On this let no one be deceived. The single enterprise that I have mentioned and that the historical profession and the public would be remiss in failing to support with every moral and financial resource that can be brought to bear would require, as an incorporated institute of Chinese studies, many millions of dollars. A suitable building—only the building—for a center in Washington for the promotion of historical study in all fields would require at the least ten millions. There would be need for endowment to subsidize living quarters for scholars, an endowment that could properly be looked upon only as a capitalization of that immense loss to scholarly investigation now produced by costly accommodations in an expensive city. There would be many millions more needed for fellowships and for sponsoring great undertakings of scholarship beyond the single monograph to which we have too long been anchored. Let us, then, begin to heed Professor Holt’s admonition for imaginative and realistic study of this enterprise by setting a goal in the beginning at not less than forty to fifty millions of dollars. If there are those among us or beyond our circle who gasp at the figure, it is only we who are to blame. We have too long failed to speak plainly, to assert that the disciplined study of the past is necessarily integral with our professions as a free people and indispensable to our maintenance of that freedom. We are no longer historical orphans, and we should not think of ourselves or permit others to think of us as such. “Historians, and all of us who read and study history,” declared Thomas Boylston Adams in a memorable address delivered three years ago in the presence of a President of the United States who had a deep sense of history, “have responsibility. History is a powerful force. Historians need to recognize their power. They are apt to be diffident, because if they are true historians they are humble in their ignorance, knowing that absolute truth is not attainable. But a working knowledge of the lessons of history is a necessity for survival. We have to know how we got here. If we step back into any of the old bogs we are done for.”

Let us heed this counsel, expressed in a style that would have brought pride to the speaker’s progenitor, that Colossus of Independence, John Adams, who also knew the value of history for a free society. Let us not envy, much less deplore, the billions available for research in science. Let us not envy the large sums available for the thousands of museums, restorations, and historic houses, now growing so fast that a new profession for the study and interpretation of the historical artifact is coming into existence.

Let us not envy the great buildings arising everywhere and the large sums available for music, for the theater, and for other manifestations of the human spirit gathered under an unlovely phrase, "the performing arts." It is the business of a nation aspiring to greatness to provide all these and still more resources to enrich the lives of the people. But let us also say to government, to private philanthropy, to the universities, and to ourselves in the profession—this is a common responsibility that we must all face, a common failure that we must repair. If we persist in placing last the study of history which the founders of this nation placed first, we shall deserve whatever obloquy the future may be justified in placing upon us. What we propose is modest indeed, but it must be stated with courage and candor.

We are being told by some amongst us that the American Revolution was of little more than local significance, that our history has a singularity that neither warned nor prepared us for world leadership in a time of revolution, that the American dream has vanished like the frontier, and that our past has been a handicap and a burden to us. One almost stands mute before these observations of earnest students of history, wondering how, if this were so, we have thus far met the demanding role in a manner altogether unprecedented. One turns in deep gratitude to that thoughtful humanist among the scientists who believes that a distinguishing mark of our culture is a sense of responsibility to human history, to its present and its future, and who thinks that the idea of the improvement of human life on earth—the very essence of the American dream—"provided the air for the great fires of science."  

It was this idea, I also believe, that made our Revolution a transforming event by identifying our inheritance and our people, in all of our strengths and weaknesses, with the whole of the human experience. The American society seems under this impulse only beginning, its dream just unfolding. The surest guarantee that this faith will prove true lies in the manner we cherish and promote a true understanding of the past. The capitol for history and for historians that we seek should be worthy of standing beside that Capitol that Thomas Jefferson called the first temple dedicated to the sovereignty of the people. This was a temple, he said, for "a nation looking far beyond the range of Athenian destinies." But in either capitol, in order to go beyond that range of greatness, one must know first of all what its boundaries were.

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27 Jefferson to Benjamin H. Latrobe, July 12, 1812, Jefferson Papers.
This only history can provide, not as a chart of action or as a blueprint for building, but as a civilizing influence. "The value of history," declared Carl Becker, "is, indeed, not scientific but moral: by liberalizing the mind, by deepening the sympathies, by fortifying the will, it enables us to control, not society, but ourselves—a much more important thing; it prepares us to live more humanely in the present and to meet rather than foretell the future."28 This is a value no society concerned about its liberty or its greatness can disregard. It must be cherished whatever the cost.