THE EDITOR'S PAGE

By ELBERT L. WATSON

Across our nation today there is a mushrooming interest in local history, genealogy, and historic preservation. The commercial world has capitalized on this interest by developing attractions where the flavor of the past makes modern Americans susceptible to parting with their money. How many of us have driven miles to visit an "authentic" western town, where we can drop by the Long Branch Saloon, ride a train and be attacked by Indians, or see a gunfight. It seems sometimes that the more ridiculous our history is made to appear by caricature or presentation, the more likelihood there is of creating a market. If this is true, then it is small wonder that in our contemporary society there is much shallowness of thought about venerable Americans and institutions of bygone years.

Fortunately, many efforts today are being directed toward making the study of history attractive without creating gross distortions. The National Historical Society is one of the leaders in this effort. In "American History Illustrated," their magazine format publication, the Society popularizes American history with factually accurate, colorfully illustrated articles which appeal to lay readers as well as professional historians. A recent special issue on the Civil War, written entirely by the eminent historian, James Robertson, contained 144 pictures to accompany the easy flow of the text. Through this method the reader is given a vivid mental picture of
the historic period and principle figures. The Society also offers annual historic tours to places of great significance in American history. Under the direction of scholarly persons, these tours enable the participants to become personally involved in the historical events.

The National Historical Society is only one group which is providing a more responsible leadership to direct our citizens to a better understanding and appreciation for our rich heritage. We might also mention American Heritage, American Association of State and Local History, and the National Park Service which supervises our nation's historic parks. At the local level, there are historical societies, such as our own, which are giving greater emphasis at this point. In a real sense one does not truly comprehend his own history until he has stood and walked in the footsteps of yesterday's patriots.

We applaud these efforts to take our nation's history from between the hard covers of a book, and make it viable to the lives of modern Americans.