

THE HENRY DUNANT SOCIETY

Present activities and plans for the future

1. Structure and objectives

The Henry Dunant Society, founded in Geneva on 24 June 1975, "brings together those wishing to study the life, work and thought of Henry Dunant". This is the Society's statutory purpose but it also has other related functions, such as promoting the publication of an annotated edition of Dunant's complete works, establishing contacts throughout the world with institutions and persons who share the same interests, organizing cultural and academic events and helping to acquire manuscripts and other documents.

At present, the Society is headed by an eight-member committee: Roger Durand (President), Jacqueline Micheli-Siardet (Vice-President), Bernard Dunant (Vice-President), Alberto Aliprandi (Treasurer), Jean-Louis Cayla (Secretary), Jean-Daniel Candaux, Jean-Christophe Curtet and Roger Mayer.

The Society itself has more than two hundred members, most of whom live in Switzerland. However, in keeping with the universal aspirations of the philanthropist in whose honour it was formed, the Society benefits from the support and co-operation of people from all corners of the world.

In accordance with its statutes, the Society maintains close relations with the institutions linked directly to the founder of the Red Cross. In Geneva, these are the ICRC, the International Red Cross Museum, the Henry Dunant Institute and the University Public Library. In addition, there is the *Dunant-Museum* in Heiden, the *Museo internazionale della Croce Rossa* in Castiglione (Italy), the *Centro Henry-Dunant* in Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Spain) and in Tokyo, the *Henry-Dunant Study Centre of Japan*.

Apart from the special events mentioned below, our members meet at least once a year for the General Assembly. This Assembly is usually accompanied by a historical lecture.

2. A listening-post for the world

The Society's primary activity consists in replying to countless requests for information, documents or other material, for example:

- A school-boy in Zaire is keen to have an Henry Dunant T-shirt.
- A Swiss pensioner collects postcards from Dunant's era.
- The editor of a Yugoslav magazine is interested in writing an article on Dunant for the general public.
- The head of a Red Cross youth centre in Peru needs a brief account of Dunant's life for his assistants.
- A branch of the French Red Cross is organizing an exhibition for which it needs a portrait of Dunant and pictures of the world he lived in.
- A Swiss publisher is planning a series on recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize and is looking for volunteers to read over the manuscripts.
- A film producer is looking for a biography to create a scenario with which to attract American sponsors.
- To mark the award of the Florence Nightingale Medal, a National Red Cross Society would like to carry out a study on contacts between Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant.
- Television companies from France, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg and Switzerland are working jointly on a documentary about the Red Cross Movement and want to know everything, right away.
- A direct descendant of one of Dunant's correspondants wants to sell some 700 letters. Are they authentic?

The list could go on and on. The number, diversity and far-flung sources of these inquiries show how universal Henry Dunant's impact was and the important role played by our Society.

We usually try to put together a reply ourselves by tracking down relevant documents. Sometimes, we refer the inquirer to one of our members who specializes in the area concerned. In other cases, we are unable to provide a satisfactory reply because we do not have the time or the necessary financial or linguistic resources necessary. Or simply because we do not know the answer: Was Dunant homosexual? What was his relationship with Léonie Kastner? Is there a "pyrophone" (a sort of organ invented by Kastner's son, designed to be powered by smoke from household stoves) in Austria?

The questions addressed to us can be simple, outlandish, fundamental or enigmatic. We are interested, even intrigued by all of them and we devote our time, energy and resources to answering them.

3. Pictorial records and medals

To satisfy the constant demand from widely varying sources, we have had to produce material for collectors and those who desire information. This not only enables us to reach a different audience but also provides income which is indispensable for the financing of our publications.

An example is a set of postcards depicting little-known curiosities such as a 1903 painting by Jan ten Kate which is kept in The Hague, the former Casino de St-Pierre where the Committee of Five was formed on 9 February 1863, a triumphal arch in Djemila, Algeria which was designed by Henry Dunant for one of his nieces, the "Dunant Bar" in Solferino and a photograph dating from 1867 (a period of distress and bankruptcy for Dunant), found by chance in a family album.

There is also a limited series of detailed prints by Michel Rouèche portraying the house where Dunant was born, his residence in Geneva which gave the emerging Red Cross its first address, the Calvin Secondary School in Geneva, the printing shop where *Notice sur la Régence de Tunis* (1857), *A memory of Solferino* (1862) and *L'esclavage chez les musulmans et aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique* (1863) were printed, the Geneva City Hall where the original Geneva Convention was signed in 1864 and the Henry Dunant Institute.

There are also commemorative medals. For the 150th anniversary in 1978 of Dunant's birth, Daniel Bobillier made an engraving of a man freeing himself from his chains. In 1985, Stéphane Baechler designed a medal showing the affinities between the Red Cross and the dove of peace. A third medal is being made for the 125th anniversary, in 1988, of the founding of the Red Cross. These medals are available in bronze, silver, gold and platinum.

4. Study tours

The Henry Dunant Society, in conjunction with the International Red Cross Museum, organized a study tour of the very places where the idea was born of caring for wounded soldiers, according them and those treating them neutral status, and setting up permanent societies for this

purpose. In Solferino, Castiglione, San Martino and Cavriana, the participants saw the setting and heard talks on the battle itself and its context. This programme, which took place in May 1983, brought those historical events to life and similar expeditions will be organized in the future.

Another tour took the Society's members to the places where Dunant spent his last years—the Winterthur library, the Trogen rooming house, his home and the district hospital in Heiden and the Sihlfeld cemetery in Zurich. This trip took place in October 1985 to mark the 75th anniversary of Henry Dunant's death. There too, talks were given to recreate the atmosphere of the period and enable the visitors to understand the circumstances in which the Hermit of Heiden became a champion of women's rights, at last received credit for his humanitarian work, became interested in pacifism, received the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901 and finally died in 1910.

Further trips are being planned, or dreamed of, to Bern and Algiers; and why not Paris, Brussels, London, Stuttgart and other places where Henry Dunant, in his tireless travels to defend so many different causes, left his mark?

5. Commemorative plaques

The historic nature of these sites remains unknown to the general public, and sometimes even to their owners and to specialists. The Society has therefore taken the initiative of placing commemorative plaques:

- In *Avully*, at the entrance to the house where Henri Colladon, Dunant's maternal grandfather, lived. Dunant had warm memories of this house where he often stayed as a child with his mother and his brothers and sisters. In addition, Colladon was for young Dunant the archetypal head of family and put him in mind of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. A plaque was inaugurated on 3 May 1986 and bore the inscription "In this house, Henri Colladon, Mayor of Avully from 1815 to 1854, regularly received his grandson Henry Dunant, later founder of the Red Cross".
- At the front of the former *Casino de St-Pierre*, where the Geneva Society for Public Welfare was convened under the dynamic chairmanship of Gustave Moynier to consider the proposals made by Dunant in *A memory of Solferino*. Some 125 years later, our Society was instrumental in having a plaque placed on the building at 3 rue de l'Evêché which reads "In this building, on 9 February 1863, the Geneva Society for Public Welfare set up a Committee whose members—Louis Appia,

General G. H. Dufour, Henry Dunant, Théodore Maunoir, and Gustave Moynier—laid the foundation of the International Committee of the Red Cross”.

Other such plaques are being considered. Among possible locations is the building in which Dunant set up the headquarters, as it were, of the early Red Cross in the 1860s, or the district hospital in Heiden, to commemorate Dr. Hermann Altherr who persuaded the wandering philanthropist to settle there in the years between 1880 and 1890.

6. The complete works of Dunant have yet to be assembled

Apart from *A memory of Solferino*, the books and pamphlets written by Henry Dunant are almost impossible to find in bookstores and have never been properly assembled in one edition. Countless papers (lecture notes, rough drafts for books, etc.) have survived and do much to reveal the thinking of the bankrupt of 1867, the historian of the humanitarian movement and the hermit of the turn of the century. We now have about 4,000 of his letters. Publishing an annotated collection of them is at once a Herculean and a delicate task, on which we have been working for several years.

Very precise guidelines have been set for the *Catalogue of correspondence* and a team of historians are sharing the work. Every document in the collection is analysed according to the same criteria, then the data are fed into a computer. A first draft of the catalogue will be printed, to publicize the list of existing letters and stimulate the search for hitherto undiscovered documents. We hope eventually to be able to publish Dunant's correspondence in its entirety.

The edition of Dunant's complete works will be composed of published and previously unpublished material which must be presented as coherently as possible. Indeed, there are almost 10,000 pages of notes, material assembled by Dunant for various purposes and rough drafts for books. The same team of historians is in the process of sorting out this mass of documents. Each item, be it two lines or 100 pages, is classified into one of some 20 categories: autobiographical material, the history of the Red Cross, feminism, pacifism, political opinion, religious convictions, notes, etc. Once classified, texts under the various headings must be assigned a place in the overall work.

7. "Henry Dunant Society Bulletin"

In order to keep its members informed of its various activities, the Society publishes a *Bulletin* at irregular intervals. Nine have so far appeared; they are composed as follows.

The first section contains a survey of the Society's activities: general assemblies, study tours, articles for sale, etc.

Another item informs readers about Dunant's continuing impact on the world, reflected in postage stamps, medals and coins, statues, boats, hymns, portraits, caricatures, etc.

The book section describes recent publications and often provides preview excerpts of them.

Most important, there are background articles which give new insights into the life of Henry Dunant and discuss related historical studies. This section presents recently acquired archives, previously unpublished documents, descriptions of hitherto unknown papers and other curios, reports on Dunant's relationship with his friends Rudolf Müller, Charles Van de Velde, Christian Haje etc., and little known aspects of Dunant's life such as his ancestors and immediate family, his activities in favour of feminism, his promotion of the pyrophone, his reading material, his health in Heiden, his political philosophy, his *Diagrammes*, etc.

The 10th issue of the *Bulletin de la Société Henry Dunant* is now in press. In addition to a review of the 12 years since the Society was founded, this issue contains a short piece about Dunant written in 1853 by one of his friends from the *Union chrétienne* and a longer article on the political crisis which broke at the very time when the original Geneva Convention was being signed by diplomats from all over Europe on 22 August 1964.

The 11th issue is due to appear in 1988. Anyone who wishes to contribute is invited to contact the Society's president, who will forward the text to the *Bulletin* committee.

8. The Henry Dunant collection

Since 1984, the Society has been publishing a series of monographs, each dealing with one aspect of Dunant's life, thought or influence.

1. *Aux sources de l'idée Croix-Rouge, actes du voyage d'étude à Solferino, à San Martino, à Castiglione et à Cavriana, les 6-8 mai 1983*, Geneva, Henry Dunant Society and International Red Cross Museum, May 1984, 138 pages.

This describes the political situation in the Europe of 1859, the area of Solferino and San Martino, the course of the battle there, relations between Italy and Switzerland at the time, the medical service of the French army and charitable activities in Geneva in the mid-19th century. It contains several previously unpublished letters from Emperor Napoleon III to his wife Empress Eugénie which were written following the fighting, an account of where Dunant went and what he did during those fateful days and an assessment of the innovative nature of his ideas.

In short, some 15 very original contributions focusing on the events which gave the "Samaritan of Solferino" the idea of a permanent, international and neutral humanitarian body.

2. Gabriel Mützenberg, *Henry Dunant le prédestiné — Du nouveau sur la famille, la jeunesse, la destinée spirituelle du fondateur de la Croix-Rouge*, Geneva, Henry Dunant Society and Editions Robert-Estienne, August 1984, 168 pages.

Until recently, almost nothing was known about family members who influenced the young Henry Dunant, that is, his grandfather (an unhappy financier), his uncle (a pacifist and humanitarian writer), his father (a discreet, even withdrawn man) and his mother (a highly sensitive and depression-prone woman).

The book includes a description of Dunant's religious upbringing at the Oratoire chapel which was the focal point for the Geneva "Réveil" and stronghold of the Evangelical Society, the place of origin of the *Union chrétienne de Genève* and of the launching of the *Alliance universelle des Unions chrétiennes des Jeunes Gens* (Y.M.C.A.). There are many illustrations including little-known portraits and reproductions of previously unpublished writings. It is, in short, a collection of illustrations which do justice to the text.

3. *De l'utopie à la réalité, actes du colloque Henry Dunant à Genève, du 3 au 5 mai 1985*, Geneva, Henry Dunant Society, 420 pages (in press).

This book contains a systematic analysis of sources from both the Geneva University Library and various Red Cross archives in Switzerland, and the background to the establishment of a museum devoted to the Red Cross idea. It presents undreamt-of aspects of Dunant the child, the businessman, the tortured soul, the forerunner of Unesco, the anti-slavery campaigner and man of God. There are also remarkable essays on philanthropy in Geneva, the creation of the Red Cross, the protection of prisoners of war, the development of the idea of peace and the "Red Cross man" (see also under "Learned symposia", below).

4. Roger Durand and Michel Roueche, *Ces lieux où Henry Dunant... Those places where Henry Dunant...* Geneva, Henry Dunant Society, October 1986, 60 pages, plates.

This magnificent booklet has an Italian format (24 by 35 cm). It contains 24 original drawings, accompanied by historical notes, representing the house where Dunant was born, the church in the Petit-Saconnex area of Geneva, the houses of Henry and Pierre Colladon, the Calvin Secondary School, the *Elysée* in Celigny, the *Tour maîtresse* prison, the *Oratoire* chapel, the Lullin et Sautter Bank, the house of General Dufour, the premises of the *Union chrétienne*, the Geographic Society, the Fick printing house, the former St-Pierre Casino, Dunant's city residence, the *Palais de l'Athénée*, the entrance to the City Hall, the houses of Gustave Moynier, the Geneva Courthouse and the Office of the International Committee.

Several other publications which will enrich the Henry Dunant Collection are being prepared:

- *125 années d'activités Croix-Rouge à Genève, 1863-1988*: a brief historical review, accompanied by illustrations of the many aspects of the humanitarian movement in the city which nurtured it and saw it grow.
- *Les publications du Comité international en 1863 et 1864*: a systematic collection—with numerous reproductions—and analysis of sources and publications during those two decisive years, from the famous *Circulaire de Berlin* to the extremely rare proceedings of the August 1864 Diplomatic Conference which produced the original Geneva Convention.
- *L'exilé et l'ermite, actes du voyage commémoratif à Zurich, Heiden, Trogen et Winterthur, les 30 et 31 octobre 1985*. The circumstances and surroundings of the last 20 years of Dunant's life.
- *Catalogue de la correspondance*.

9. Learned symposia

From 3 to 5 May 1985, the Henry Dunant Society brought together a number of eminent specialists to sum up the major aspects of Dunant's life. The symposium, which had a large and well-informed audience, was a great success.

In late October 1988, the Society will embark on a new intellectual adventure, this time with *Les précurseurs immédiats de la Croix-Rouge, 1847-1863*, that is, the women, men and institutions that showed their

devotion to the same interests as the Committee of Five by expressing their ideas or engaging in activities such as improving care for wounded or sick soldiers, setting up relief societies, promoting international solidarity, giving neutral status to wounded people and medical staff and perhaps promoting protection for prisoners of war.

Among the forerunners mentioned by the founders themselves or discovered afterwards are the following:

- *Guillaume-Henri Dufour* (Switzerland), Sonderbund War.
The *Zurich Relief Society*, *idem*.
Félix de Breda (Paris), *Projet d'organisation d'hospitaliers militaires*.
Florence Nightingale and *Miss Stanley* (Great Britain), Crimean War.
The Grand Duchess *Helen Pavlowna* and *Sisters of the Exaltation of the Cross* (Russia), Crimean War.
The *Sisters of Charity* (France) Crimean War.
The *Evangelical Society* (Geneva), war of Italian independence.
The *Order of Saint John of Jerusalem* (Germany), war of Italian independence.
United States Sanitary Commission, American Civil War.
United States Army Christian Commission, *idem*.
Rauhehaus of Hamburg, and a group of friars from *Aachen* (Germany), Danish War.
- *Nicolas Pirogov*, (Russia) the war in the Caucasus and the Crimean War.
Ferdinando Palasciano (Italy), war of 1848 and *La neutralità dei feriti, in tempo di guerra*, 1861.
Henri Arrault (France), *Notice sur le perfectionnement du matériel des ambulances volantes*, 1861.
Instructions for the government of armies of the United States in the field, or *Francis Lieber Code*, 1863, American Civil War.
Clara Barton, *idem*.
Knights of the Order of Malta.

This list is probably incomplete. Additions can be made up to the end of October 1988. We hope that the present article will prompt those interested to contact us, for example, to inform us of the existence and identity of other forerunners of the Red Cross, or to recommend lecturers or specialists on some related subject.

10. Conclusion

The Henry Dunant Society, a small institution staffed exclusively by volunteers, is just as interested in historical research as it is in giving the world an accurate picture of Henry Dunant. We are happy to reply to requests and suggestions from anyone, anywhere. At the same time, we endeavour to strike a balance between activities of a scholarly nature and those aimed at the general public.*

Our hope is that all seekers after historical truth will combine their knowledge and energy with ours; that the women and men of the Red Cross and Red Crescent who are interested in the origins and the genesis of their Movement will lend us their help and enthusiasm!

Roger Durand
*President of the
Henry Dunant Society*

* The headquarters of the Henry Dunant Society is at the following address: 10, chemin Haccius, 1212 Geneva.