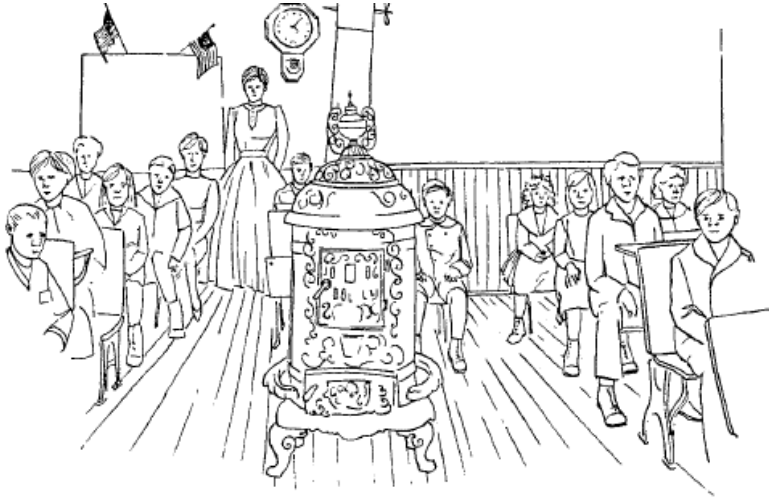


CHAPTER 14



The Life of the Mind and the Spirit

THE CULTURAL LIFE OF NORTH DAKOTA was tied to its economic base. The base, wheat farming, was laid when railroads, new milling processes, and mobile farm machines opened the northern prairies to outside markets. Attracted by the prospect of quick wealth from wheat and rising land values, settlers and speculators rushed into the new country. In the boom years the pioneers not only opened up farms, built roads and railroads, founded towns, and established governments, but they also started churches, schools, colleges, newspapers, libraries, and most of the institutions necessary for a civilized way of life.

With their eyes optimistically upon the future, the pioneers sought to establish all of the standard institutions and to acquire all of the standard cultural values, not only from a regard for the institutions and values themselves, but also for the contribution which these would make to the rise of property values. So boomers without much religion generously supported new churches; boomers without much education became the patrons of schools and colleges; boomers without much culture sponsored a host of cultural activities.

They succeeded too well. The raw, new country soon had more of the instrumentalities of civilization than its economic base could well support. In their optimism the pioneers disregarded the limitations set by the semiarid nature of the country. They established too many schools, colleges, churches, and newspapers. Because there were too many, all would have a hard, often losing struggle for survival against the difficulties created by distance and the sparseness of the population. The

steady increase in farm size and the steady decline of farm population sharpened such difficulties. Space itself had a social cost where a meager population scattered over a wide area increased the per capita expenditures for schools, churches, roads, and many other things necessary for a civilized society. North Dakotans paid a high price to learn that the semiarid prairie spread the population thinly.

Yet the pioneers accomplished much. By the outbreak of the First World War, they had given North Dakota a complex and firmly established cultural life. Churches grew stronger, ministering to more people. Schools improved, giving better educational opportunities; normal schools increased their offerings, preparing farm boys and girls more adequately for teaching careers. A university and an agricultural college prospered, opening the professions to the ambitious, giving a sound liberal education, and even expanding the bounds of knowledge through research. A historical society gathered books, newspapers, and artifacts, preserving and publishing the records of the past. Newspapers and magazines increased their circulations, spreading intelligence and breaking down the isolation of the lonely prairie. Here and there men and women cherished books, built up private libraries, and wrote prose and poetry, sometimes producing passable literature. So, for all the difficulties, all the failures, all the crudities, the pioneers brought to the North Dakota frontier much cultural baggage from their old homes. They enriched their new ones with the life of the mind and the spirit.

THE PIONEER STOCK

Cultural life was affected by the sparsity of the population. Climate caused sparsity: with an average of only seventeen inches of rainfall a year, farms grew steadily larger and the rural population smaller. Moreover, the towns, trading centers for the rural population, could themselves be but small.

Some comparisons will show important differences between North Dakota and more humid parts of the nation. In 1910, with settlement practically completed, North Dakota had 8 persons per square mile, the United States had 31 persons, the Middle Atlantic states 193, and Ohio 117. In North Dakota both rainfall and population fell off to the westward. In 1910 the Red River Valley had 16 persons per square mile, the Drift Prairie 10, and the Missouri Plateau only 5. In North Dakota only 11 percent of the population lived in places of 2,500 or more; in the United States 46 percent lived in such places, in the Middle Atlantic states 71 percent, in Ohio 56 percent. In North Dakota the sparseness of the population, living mostly on farms and in small villages, made more difficult the support of churches and schools and other social institutions; in any given area there were few people to take part and few to pay the cost. North Dakotans needed churches, schools, libraries, and other social institutions, but the scarcity of people increased their per capita cost. In North Dakota, as in all of the semiarid west, space itself became

a social cost.

The pioneers, of course, did not and could not realize this key fact concerning the society they were forming as they came into the new country. Many, especially those of the older American stock, were restless speculators seeking easy money. A Congregational missionary at Hope described them in 1883:

These newcomers are so eager for the land... that they have little time to give to anything else.... They are found in all these new booming towns! Too many are the fly-speculators, land-jumpers, claim-seekers, and people looking for a profit rather than a home.... The main trouble with this class of people is that they have not come to stay, and, therefore, take little or no interest in our permanent institutions. What we want is the actual settler, with his wife and family.¹

Yet many of them were interested in their communities. Such a person was Linda Warfel Slaughter, a former student at Oberlin College and the wife of an army surgeon. At rough, frontier Bismarck she organized the first Sunday School in North Dakota in 1872, brought her friends together in a circle to read Shakespeare, acted as postmistress, taught the first school, served as first county superintendent of schools, filed on a homestead, and led the local woman-suffrage movement.

The newcomers long predominated. As late as 1910, two-thirds of the population had been born outside the state. There was a rich diversity in which immigrants played the leading part. In 1910 more than 27 percent of North Dakota's residents were foreign-born; with their children (one or both parents foreign-born), they made up 71 percent of the population. The remainder, except for about six thousand Indians and six hundred Negroes, were native whites of native parentage, or largely persons of the older American stock.

The newer Americans came from many lands. Counting the immigrants and their children, there were in North Dakota in 1910 about 125,000 Norwegians, 117,000 Germans, 73,000 English and Celtic people (many of them from Canada), 29,000 Swedes, 13,000 Danes, and substantial numbers of French, Bohemian, Polish, and Finnish persons as well as smaller numbers of Belgians, Hollanders, Bulgarians, Greeks, Armenians, and Russians. Thus about 21 percent of North Dakota's residents were Norwegians, 20 percent Germans (about half of them from Russia), 12 percent English and Celtic (Irish, Scottish, and Welsh), 5 percent Swedish, 12 percent other newer Americans, and 29 percent older Americans.

By 1920 the make-up of the population had been somewhat changed by a substantial increase in the numbers of Germans and Russians. The census that year showed 143,000 Germans and over 11,000 Russians; the

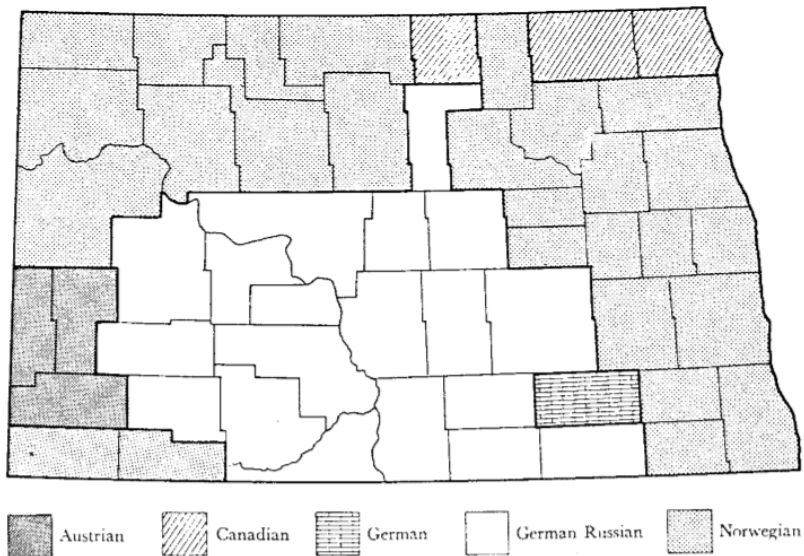
¹Earl E. G. Linden, "[The History of Congregationalism in North Dakota](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1939), p. 37.

Germans then made up 22 percent of the population, the Norwegians slightly less than 20 percent, and the English and Celtic elements less than 10 percent. Although the number of immigrants and their children had increased from 407,000 to 432,000, they made up only 67 percent of the population, a smaller percentage than in 1910.

NORWEGIANS AND GERMAN RUSSIANS

Although an ethnic map would show the immigrant groups widely scattered, the Norwegians and the German Russians tended to hold distinct sections of the state. The Norwegians, coming first, settled principally in the two eastern tiers of counties and westward along the main line of the Great Northern Railroad in the northern part of the state. The German Russians, arriving later, formed a large triangle in the central part of the state. The base of the German Russian triangle ran from Dickey County to Hettinger County along the southern boundary of the state; its apex was in Pierce and McHenry counties. Immigrants from Canada settled in the northeastern corner. There was a Bohemian settlement about Lidgerwood, a Polish settlement in Walsh County, and a settlement of Hollanders in Emmons County.

The Norwegians were for many years the largest group of the newer Americans. They were largely of peasant stock, having been small



LARGEST FOREIGN WHITE STOCK IN EACH COUNTY, 1910

farmers, small renters, or farm laborers in the old country. But occasionally there was a minister, a schoolmaster, or, more rarely, a doctor or a lawyer among them. Illiteracy was almost unknown. Everyone had learned to read in Norway, for a law of 1736 required all persons to be confirmed, and the state Lutheran church required

candidates for confirmation to be familiar with Luther's Catechism, the hymnbook, and the Bible. Norway established public schools in 1739.

Not only did Norwegian immigrants read, but they had also developed a bent for politics. The Norwegian constitution of May 17, 1814, had begun abolition of the nobility and had given much power to the common people. Perhaps even more than the other Scandinavians and the Germans, the Norwegians were individualists. They had a strict, puritan moral code, and were a pious, serious-minded, and introspective people; yet they were often excessive in fighting, drinking, and love-making.

In 1910 some 125,000 North Dakotans were of Norwegian stock and 117,000 were of German stock. Of the Germans, about 60,000 were German Russians, that is, descendants of Germans who had emigrated to Russia. In the 1760's, Catherine II of Russia, herself of German birth and training, invited Europeans to settle in Russia, promising them land, religious liberty, and exemption from military service. Germany was suffering from the devastation of the Seven Years' War, and by 1770, Catherine's agents had moved 50,000 Germans to the Lower Volga region. In 1770 there were 140 German colonies in Russia; by 1914 there were 192.

A second migration occurred after Alexander I became czar in 1801. He wished to settle Germans about the Black Sea on land recently taken from the Turks. His recruiting agents, as well as Catherine's earlier ones, secured colonists from all over Germany, but they were especially successful in the southwestern section. Many poor German peasants in Baden, Bavaria, and Württemberg, suffering from the ravages of French armies during the Napoleonic Wars, were ready to move. Taking a pair of beasts, a few farm tools, and what little cash they had, they traveled more than a thousand miles to the Black Sea. Having seen armies destroy all other property, they sought land. Land hunger took them to Russia; it later brought many of their descendants to the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas.

In Russia the German colonists were determined to remain German, to keep their religion and the German language. They succeeded, but the hundred years in Russia had a profound influence upon them. Desiring land, they became and largely remained farmers, living in one- or two-street villages and going out to their fields of wheat, oats, and barley. Although each village had a herd of cattle, the colonists took little interest in dairying.

They suffered much hardship. Drought on the barren, semiarid steppes brought crop failures. The Russian agents had deceived them about the nature of the country, and the colonists faced a long struggle to adapt to the dry grassland. Grafting Russian officials took advantage of their helplessness; savage, nomadic Tartars plundered their villages. Their early homes were mere clay huts, sometimes without windows and doors. Epidemics of cholera, smallpox, measles, or typhoid would carry

off a fourth or even a half of the population of a village. Thus the German Russians became a tough, hardy people, accustomed to suffering and adversity.

Moreover, in Russia they were an isolated people, a fact of the greatest significance. They were living in a strange land among a population speaking a strange tongue. No educated Germans—pastors, priests, teachers, professional men, or tradesmen—had joined the migration from Germany. So the Germans in Russia lost all contact with the homeland; they were cut off from all the progress that took place in Germany in the nineteenth century. They could have no stimulating contacts with their Russian neighbors, who were at a lower stage of culture than their own. They had not the time, the ability, nor the money to buy and read books and newspapers. When the Russian government built railroads, these generally bypassed the German villages. The German Russians did not mingle with the Russians; few learned to speak Russian, and there was no intermarriage. Furthermore, each village was all of one faith, Protestant or Catholic.

Isolation and especially the lack of educated people among the illiterate peasants who had migrated from Germany were responsible for the lack of interest in schools and education in the German colonies and hence the backwardness of the people. It persisted because the colonies always had much difficulty in securing priests, pastors, and teachers. When a Catholic colony did secure a priest, he was usually Polish and looked down upon his illiterate parishioners with contempt, calling them dogs and even manhandling them. Such a priest could give no leadership that would arouse respect for education in a village. Sometimes, however, a Protestant colony managed to secure a pastor from Germany and then made rapid progress.

Eventually, every colony established German-language elementary schools. But the peasants, absorbed in farming and despising the white-collar class, such as the Russian officials and shysters who tricked and cheated them, took little interest in education. In the village of Neudorf, for example, the church cost fifteen thousand rubles and the school only fifteen hundred. The German Russians were as devoted to the church as they were indifferent to the school. The few young people who received more than elementary schooling were usually weaklings who did not have the strength to make a living from the land. When the Russian government established secondary schools in the colonies in 1892, with Russian teachers and with the Russian language mandatory, the Germans were hostile. Yet by 1900 some young people were entering other fields besides farming—becoming teachers, writers, church leaders, businessmen, and government officials.

Indifference to education, which was to be such a handicap in America, did not prevent the Germans from prospering in Russia. They were a virile race with a high birth rate. They married early, at fifteen or twenty, and the parents set up the son with horses, farm tools, and, if

possible, land. The father was a dictator feared by the children; strictness and respect for authority marked family life. Men, women, and children worked hard in the fields. They were thrifty and acquisitive, and they contributed much to the Russian economy by their example of energetic industry. They planted trees, creating orchards and village forests on the treeless steppes. They expanded their land holdings.

When land became scarce and when the Russian government began a program of Russification and took away some of their special privileges, such as exemption from military service, some of the German Russians began to leave for America. The western portions of the Plains states from North Dakota to Kansas, just then being settled, offered them vacant lands. From 1885 to 1905 they came by the thousands, spreading northward from Aberdeen, South Dakota, over twenty-three counties in North Dakota, mostly on the drier, less fertile lands of the Missouri Plateau. They were the only settlers in North Dakota who came from a semiarid country.

In North Dakota the German Russians showed the same characteristics they had displayed in Russia. In Russia they had clung to the German language; in North Dakota, German was heard on the streets of their towns and in their church services fifty years and more after their first coming. As late as the 1930's thousands of their children did not learn the English language until they began school. In Russia they had lived by themselves; in North Dakota they were still clannish, forming the largest single element in all but three of the counties in the German Russian triangle. For years they had little contact with other nationalities. In Russia they had resisted Russification; in North Dakota they long had the reputation of resisting Americanization and were still said in the 1930's to admire everything German.

In Russia they had neglected the schools; in North Dakota they disliked free public education and compulsory-attendance laws. Even in the 1920's few German Russian children were completing the eighth grade, and Joseph B. Voeller, a German Russian educator, wrote in 1940: "To this day the shortest terms, the poorest schools, the lowest teachers' salaries, the most inadequate equipment, and the most irregular attendance, are found in German-Russian communities."

The German Russians had been devoted to their church in Russia but had quarreled with its priests; in North Dakota they showed their devotion by attendance and support, but Bishop John Shanley called some of them "ruffians" for their treatment of priests, and the priests thought of them as "hard-headed and stubborn." In Russia every German village had a saloon and drinking was a serious evil; in North Dakota they made a mockery of the prohibition law. In Russia they had been farmers; in North Dakota most of them lived on the land. In Russia they had ignored dairying; in North Dakota they tended to be one-crop wheat farmers, resisting diversification.

Although there were many similarities between life in Russia and

that in their new home, the German Russians suffered a revolution in status when they came to North Dakota. Joseph B. Voeller wrote in 1940:

In Russia they were the leaders; the upper stratum of people. They were more advanced than the native Russians. They were more successful in making a living than their neighbors. Their leadership was evidenced by their better homes, villages, farm animals and more productive fields. Their prosperity enabled them to buy and rent land around their villages. They were driving out the native Russians in their own land. Here in America they are at the other end of the social and economic scale. Other nationalities look down upon them. They are the underdogs. Most of them have stuck to farming in sections where farming doesn't pay by their methods. Few of them have entered other callings. They are therefore poorer than their neighbors of other nationalities. Their indifference to education they have brought with them to this country. Having neglected education, they are behind other nationalities in culture and refinement. It is not surprising that other nationalities do look down upon them. Reason or no reason, the German-Russians resent being the underdogs. Resentment makes them recall better days in Russia. They recall their situation there and compare it with their present one here, and think Russia was a better land.²

The revolution in status, however, was an effective incentive and stimulus to change. In the 1930's, and then even faster in the prosperous years after the Second World War, the clannishness, isolation, backwardness, and neglect of education began to pass away. Joseph Voeller himself, an outspoken critic of his own people, was an example: he became county superintendent of schools in Pierce County and wrote an excellent thesis on the German Russians for his master's degree. The German-speaking priests brought to the Catholics among them by Abbot (later Bishop) Vincent Wehrle stimulated their interest in education, which grew with the establishment of parochial schools. Eighth-grade completions and high-school attendance increased markedly in the 1930's, and a number of young people were going on to college and into the professions, becoming priests, pastors, teachers, lawyers, and businessmen. By the late 1950's the German Russian counties had about as many eighth-grade and high-school completions as other counties, although they still had a smaller percentage of young people enrolled in college.

Long before such changes, the Old World experiences of the foreign-born supplied a background for radicalism in North Dakota. The German Russians had become accustomed in Russia to government ownership, for the Russian government owned the railroads and the saloons. The German Russians themselves had cooperative granaries for the poor,

²Joseph B. Voeller, "[The Origin of the German-Russian People and Their Role in North Dakota](#)" (Unpublished M.S. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1940), pp. 55-56.

cooperative fire insurance, cooperative herding of livestock, and cooperative tree planting, and they thought the middlemen robbed them, a typical North Dakota attitude.

Norwegian immigrants also brought radicalism to North Dakota. In Norway the shortage of arable land had forced the peasants to eke out a living from their farms with work in forests, fisheries, or mines, so Norwegian crofters and farm workers had a long history of strike activity. They made the first collective wage negotiation as early as 1634. For many years they took a leading part in strikes and labor disturbances, learned socialistic doctrines, demanded and got the vote and a larger part in government, formed cooperative purchasing groups, and set up sick-benefit funds. Norwegian farm workers, crofters, and industrial workers often lived on a diet of potatoes and salt for dinner, black bread without butter and black coffee at other meals. From 1849 on, they responded to poverty, unemployment, and much child labor with fighting unions, many strikes, and the formation of the Norwegian Labour party. Moreover, they had long opposed Danish and Swedish influence in Norway, a species of outside control, though somewhat different from that which they were to suffer in North Dakota.³

THE NORTH DAKOTA CHARACTER

Besides radicalism, the German Russians, the Norwegians, and all the foreign-born for that matter had other things in common. All had come to North Dakota from afar, across thousands of miles of land and ocean. They were people who had the energy and courage to leave their old homes, to travel great distances, to break the old patterns of their lives. Most of them were poor, suffering psychologically from all that poverty implied in feelings of insecurity and inferiority. In North Dakota they were living in a strange country with strange customs and a strange speech. Even the older Americans, the native-born among the settlers, shared the feeling of strangeness and loneliness on the great open grassland. And all, foreign-born and native alike, shared hope and courage. They had come because of the opportunities which the new country offered: the foreign-born sought land for homes, the older Americans often for speculation.

They soon became North Dakotans. "They feel it, they boast of it," wrote Bishop Cameron Mann of the Episcopal church in 1902. He also noted:

Soil and climate and circumstances are doing their work. The boundless stretch of the prairie from sunrise to sunset, the cloudless sky, the long winter nights and long summer days, the ever-singing wind, the

³Edvard Bull, *The Norwegian Trade Union Movement*, International Confederation of Trade Unions Monographs on National Trade Union Movements, No. 4 (Brussels, 1956), pp. 12-44.

prodigal wealth of wheat and flax—all these mold and color humanity. So in the North Dakotan one finds a man prompt, generous, speculative, ready to learn each new thing, hard to tie to anything, but, when tied, staunch, sturdy, and loyal.⁴

With the passing years, environment and experience fixed certain traits in the character of the people. Remoteness, with its loneliness and isolation, placed a premium on friendliness and courage, and North Dakotans became brave and friendly, ready to lend a helping hand. The cool, dry climate made them a hustling, energetic people who took pride in withstanding the rigors of hard winters. Exploitation and dependence made many of them radical, suspicious of the interests, aggressive, independent, and loyal members of a self-conscious minority. Sometimes the North Dakotan was optimistic—and for good reason. John Wirsch, for example, came from southern Russia in 1891 and started farming in Dickey County with just one yoke of oxen. Twenty years later he owned 1,280 acres of land, 20 horses, 35 head of cattle, and all of the machinery necessary to operate his farm. Often, however, frontier conditions and drought accustomed North Dakotans to hardship and made them cautious, always worrying about the winter.

Early North Dakotans were an alert and intelligent people who had time for reading and social meetings. “The wheat farmer is busy only at seeding time, and at harvest and threshing,” wrote Professor James E. Boyle, formerly a member of the faculty at the University of North Dakota, in 1918. Boyle explained:

He belongs to one or two farmers’ clubs. He has one or two farm papers—real farm papers, that meet his local needs. He has his church papers and at least one daily paper. His mail is brought to him daily by the rural mail carrier. Every farmer, of course, has his rural phone. [Daily papers and phones were far from universal in 1918.] He makes a weekly visit to the nearby village, or to the more pretentious “county seat” if he owns a Ford, and practically every prosperous farmer has his motor car. The winter season is long, but farm labor is the lightest then and this is the season for public meetings and conventions on every possible subject. This is the season when farmers do most reading. A very considerable number of farmers move into town for the winter or even travel South.⁵

Boyle’s idealized picture does not however, show the inner adjustment of the immigrants to the new country. Drawn together by mutual understanding, the Norwegian settlers and others developed compact settlements of people of like origin, even those from a particular valley in Norway. So on every hand the immigrant saw cultural institutions brought over from the homeland. The Norwegians-

⁴*North Dakota Sheaf* (Fargo), July, 1902, p. 4.

⁵James E. Boyle, “[The Agrarian Movement in the Northwest](#),” *American Economic Review*, VIII (September 1918), 506.

American, for example, continued to use his native language. He attended a Norwegian-American church; he read Norwegian-American newspapers; he joined Norwegian-American societies; and he even sent his son to a Norwegian-American college. Yet he learned some English, took out citizenship papers, became a voter, often served in some local office, and rubbed shoulders with older Americans in store, land office, and political meeting. This process of adaptation deeply influenced the cultural life of the state—the languages spoken, the books read, the church services held, and the newspapers published.

The language change was fundamental. Most immigrants became bilingual, learning English but also clinging to their native tongue. English was the language of the pocketbook and outer shell of life without warmth; the old language, spoken at home, was the language of the most intimate and valuable experience.

MISSIONARY EFFORTS

Whenever white men came to the wilderness, they carried with them not only language but much of the baggage of civilization. As soon as they were able, they set up institutions to nourish the life of the mind and the spirit. Churches, schools, newspapers, and colleges would bring religion and enlightenment to a rude new country.

The lawlessness and violence of the fur-trading frontier made religion imperative. After an attack upon his colony by the métis had killed several settlers, the Earl of Selkirk arranged with Bishop Joseph Octave Plessis of Quebec to send Catholic priests to the Red River Valley. In 1818, two young priests, Joseph Norbert Provencher and Sévère Joseph Dumoulin, came as missionaries to the Red River of the North. Father Provencher settled at St. Boniface, Father Dumoulin at Pembina.

Working among the Indians and métis, Father Dumoulin had baptized 394 persons, solemnized 68 marriages, and performed 49 burials by the fall of 1822. He left Pembina in 1823, but priests from St. Boniface and other places often went with the métis in the 1830's and 1840's on their buffalo hunts across the northern Dakota prairies, saying Mass, teaching, and comforting the sick.

In 1843, Father George A. Belcourt accompanied the hunters, and in the spring of 1848 he built a mission at Pembina. A little later he built a second mission at St. Joseph (present-day Walhalla) at the foot of Pembina Mountain. Father Belcourt made long journeys to carry the Gospel to Indian and half-breed camps. He was aided by young Father Albert Lacombe and later by Father Joseph Goiffon. Father Goiffon, caught in an early blizzard, spent two days on the prairie; one of his frozen legs had to be amputated.

While the Catholics enjoyed a good deal of success, early Protestant missionary efforts failed. Baptists (half-breed James Tanner and young Elijah Terry) came to Pembina in 1852, but the Sioux killed Terry that

June. In 1853 the Reverend Alonzo Barnard, a Presbyterian, and David B. Spencer, a Congregationalist, started a mission at St. Joseph, but they gave up in 1855 after Mrs. Barnard had died of hardship and exposure and Mrs. Spencer had been shot by the Sioux.

The Catholic priests, however, though often in great danger, were never harmed. The most famous of the many to visit the region was Father Pierre Jean DeSmet, a stocky, benign Belgian Jesuit. He was a saintly character who won the love and respect of the Indians. They treated him with much kindness, gave him many a feast, and said that he had not a "forked tongue." He made many voyages to the Upper Missouri country from 1839 to 1868, stopping in northern Dakota to preach to the Indians and traders whom he instructed and baptized. "He never carried a weapon of any kind," wrote Major General D. S. Stanley, "never attempted violence... and never suffered in any way from the aggressiveness of the savages. His only means of defense were love and gentleness." Once, however, Father DeSmet knocked down an Indian who had tried to bully him and gave him a sound thrashing; he had been nicknamed "Samson" as a youth, and on this occasion he certainly lived up to the epithet.

Father DeSmet's visits established no permanent mission in northern Dakota. Soon after his death, however, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs assigned Fort Totten Reservation to the Roman Catholic church. In 1874, four Grey Nuns from Montreal began to conduct a manual-labor school for the Indians at Fort Totten. Father Jerome Hunt, the most notably priest to serve at the fort, prepared a catechism, a prayer book, and a hymnal in the Sioux language.

The first resident priest along the Missouri River in northern Dakota was Abbot Martin Marty, Order of St. Benedict, from St. Meinard's Abbey in Indiana. He started a mission for the Indians at Fort Yates in 1876 and, with his assistants, Father Chrysostom Foffa and Brother Giles Laugel, also cared for Catholics at Bismarck and Forts Rice, Lincoln, Stevenson, Buford, and Seward. In 1879 he was made Vicar Apostolic when Pope Leo XIII designated Dakota Territory as a Vicariate Apostolic. Abbot Marty was consecrated Bishop in 1880; he made his headquarters at Yankton and had thirteen priests with which to care for Dakota.

While Abbot Marty was organizing Catholicism, Protestant missionaries in the 1870's began to come among the farming settlers and townsmen who were entering northern Dakota. Missionaries of three Norwegian Lutheran synods organized congregations in Richland and Cass counties in 1871 and in Traill County in 1872. The Presbyterians began services in a tent hotel in Fargo in December, 1871, and organized a church in Bismarck in 1873. Methodists and Episcopalians held their first services in Fargo in the summer of 1872, the Episcopalians in the dining tent of General Thomas R. Rosser's Northern Pacific construction camp. A missionary of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, preaching

in German, came to Town Berlin (present-day Great Bend) in 1874. Missionaries of the Evangelical Association (later the Evangelical United Brethren church) began work among Germans in Richland County in 1877. In 1878, one of them, the young pioneer pastor A. C. Schmidt, set up preaching stations in Fargo, Casselton, Grand Forks, Erie, and Grafton, driving a horse and buggy over 250 miles on one missionary journey.

These men and others spread religion through the rough, lawless new country. Holding their first services in tents, sod houses, log cabins, dugouts, schoolhouses, rooms above stores, dance halls, barns, and even saloons, the missionaries were soon organizing congregations and erecting church buildings. At Bismarck, Father J. B. Genin, working in his cassock on the new Catholic church, injured himself in a fall from the scaffold. In Minot two gamblers shot it out ten minutes after attending Mass; one was killed. One of the Minot church trustees ran off to Montana and opened a saloon with the money he had collected to build a Catholic church. Abbot Vincent Wehrle wrote: "Minot had some three or four decent Catholic families in town; the rest were gamblers, saloon keepers, escaped jailbirds, men run away from their wives and wives run away from their husbands."

Like the settlers they sought to serve, the missionaries followed the railroads. The Presbyterians named one division the Northern Pacific Presbytery. All covered large areas, on foot or on skis, with horse and wagon, or by rail. Abbot Wehrle, appointed pastor of Devils Lake in 1888, was soon caring for Catholics at twenty places, from Michigan City to Fort Buford, a distance of 270 miles. He was almost constantly on the road. A Missouri Synod missionary had thirteen preaching stations. The Reverend Hermann F. Buegel, pastor at St. Thomas for twenty years, drove a team of horses more than sixty thousand miles.

Others also performed heroic labors. The Reverend Gotthard Potratz, a Missouri Synod pastor with a salary of \$350 a year, founded twenty-four congregations and preaching stations. The Reverend Bjug Harstad—a Norwegian Synod Lutheran who preached in English, Norwegian, or German—skied or drove across the prairie and organized sixteen congregations in two years. With little in the way of salary, he took a claim and farmed to support his missionary work. In 1876 the Reverend Richard Wainwright, an Episcopalian, was traveling four hundred miles a month to hold services at Fort Seward, Valley City, Pembina, Bismarck, and other points. Benedictine monks from St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, built many of the Catholic missions in northern Dakota.⁶

⁶The histories of the various church groups are narrated in: Sister Mary Aquinas Norton, "[Catholic Missions and Missionaries among the Indians of Dakota](#)," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, V (April 1931), 149-165; Anton Hillesland, "[The Norwegian Lutheran Church in the Red River Valley](#)," *North*

THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCHES

At first the churches of northern Dakota were parts of synods, conferences, or dioceses of Minnesota or the Upper Middle West. Later they formed separate organizations. Episcopalians made North Dakota a missionary district with its own bishop in 1883. The Evangelical Association set up the territory as the Dakota Conference in 1884. The German Congregational church also formed its Dakota Conference in 1884; it organized the North Dakota Conference in 1907. Presbyterians established the Synod of North Dakota in 1885. The Methodists set up an annual conference to care for northern Dakota in 1886. Pope Leo XIII created the Diocese of Jamestown for the state of North Dakota in 1889. The Right Reverend John Shanley, its first Bishop, moved his see to Fargo in 1891 and the name was changed to the Diocese of Fargo. In 1910, a year after Bishop Shanley's death, the western part of the state became the Diocese of Bismarck, with Abbot Vincent Wehrle as Bishop.

The churches, stimulated by booming settlement and denominational rivalry, grew rapidly. The Methodists, for example, had forty-seven churches as early as 1886. By 1890 there were in all about 64,000 church members—48 percent of them Catholics, 26 percent Lutherans, and most of the remaining 26 percent divided among the leading Protestant denominations, of which the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists were the strongest. By 1906, when the second boom was well under way, there were thirty-seven denominations in the state. Dr. C. A. Armstrong, the historian of North Dakota Methodism, has described the rapid growth:

There was a wild scramble to hold the first service in as many towns as possible.... The country was new, people were optimistic and generous in support of new things. Townsite companies gave free lots to all churches. The lumber yards were trusting and willing to sell lumber for a new church on a promise, or less, in many cases. The Mission Boards had funds from eastern donors anxious to convert the Indians, the cowboys, and the outlaws of the New West. The result was that many churches were built on less than a "shoe string," and located where there were few members and no

[Dakota Historical Society Collections](#), VII (1925), 195-283; Lambert J. Mehl, "[Missouri Grows to Maturity in North Dakota: A Regional History of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1953); Richard M. Lunde, "[History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in the Dakotas](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1959); Marian E. McKechnie, "[Spiritual Pioneering: A History of the Synod of North Dakota, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1955); Gerald M. Weber, "[John Shanley: First Bishop of Fargo](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, St. Paul Seminary, 1951); C. A. Armstrong, *History of the Methodist Church in North Dakota* (Fargo: The Author, 1916); W. C. Hunter, *Presbyterianism in North Dakota* (N.p.: Presbyterian Synod of North Dakota, 1959).

Many church leaders were notable builders. Bishop John Shanley, son of Irish immigrants and beloved first Catholic Bishop of North Dakota, dedicated 205 churches in eighteen years. From 1893 to 1915 the Reverend Jabez G. Moore, a big man both physically and in his plans for Methodism, had a part in building 70 churches and 72 parsonages. In the boom days everybody expected growth. Bishop Shanley wrote: "We can, the most of us at least, expect to live to see North Dakota as thickly settled as Pennsylvania, to see the country dotted with churches." With such expectations, churches were built where there were only a handful of members. In 1887, General George W. Cass, former president of the Northern Pacific, gave money to build a beautiful Episcopal church of stone at Casselton as a memorial to his son. When the building was completed, only eight persons attended the meeting to organize the mission.

Such building gave the state more churches than it needed and more than the members could support. Only a third of the population were church members, but the churches of Milnor could seat twice the population, and yet another was planned. Overexpansion meant many churches with few members. By 1916 the state had 2,520 local church organizations with 225,877 members, or an average of only 90 members per church. Only three states had a lower average.

But in North Dakota the averages varied widely from denomination to denomination. In 1916 the Roman Catholics had 352 churches and 95,859 members, or an average of 252 members per congregation. The eight principal Lutheran synods had 1,007 churches and 72,026 members, or an average of 72 members per congregation. Five older American denomination (Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, and Episcopal) had 87 churches and 40,410 members, or an average of 48 members per congregation. With averages like these, many congregations had only a few families.

Such small congregations could not support a vigorous church life. They were a result of both the sparsity of the population and the rivalry of many denominations. Small congregations meant that one pastor had to serve several churches. The constant travel, the dissatisfaction of pastors' wives often left alone, the isolation, the cold climate, the poor pay—all these conditions made it difficult for churches to secure or keep pastors. Some used seminary students. The German Congregationalists and the Episcopalians often depended on lay readers; the Catholics turned to Benedictine monks.

Small congregations and the poverty of the population made all churches dependent on outside aid. Bishop Shanley had to raise money by preaching retreats in the East; he often said in later years: "My house came out of my throat." Bishop Shanley checked the creation of small congregations by forbidding Catholics to build churches on their own

initiative; when they did, he refused to send them priests. The older American churches, however, were more dependent on outside aid than were the Catholics and Lutherans, the stronger groups in the state. Over the years the Presbyterian church in North Dakota received one million dollars from its national mission board. The Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians were hurt more by the moving away of their members than were the Catholics and Lutherans. At Devils Lake the Episcopal church lost forty members in six months; at Fargo it lost half the membership in seven years. A clergyman quipped: "The patron saint is certainly 'Exodus.'" Such heavy losses disheartened those who remained. Even the Catholics suffered losses; one priest encouraged a thousand families to emigrate to Alberta. In 1909, Bishop Shanley forbade any priest who would encourage emigration to say Mass in North Dakota.

The older American churches were also checked in their missionary efforts in North Dakota by the ethnic make-up of the population. By 1910 some 71 percent of the population were immigrants and their children. Most of the Scandinavians belonged to one of the Lutheran synods organized for their particular nationality group. There were five Norwegian Lutheran synods, one Icelandic, one Swedish, two Finnish, two Danish, and four German. The Germans and German Russians were divided among several churches. Many were Lutherans and many were Catholics, some were Mennonites, some members of the Evangelical Association, some Baptists, some Congregationalists, and some members of the Reformed church. Besides the Germans and the German Russians, the Catholic church had the Irish, the French Canadians, the German-Hungarians, the Poles, and some of the Bohemians.

First the lack of German-speaking priests, then conflict between German priests of an authoritarian type and the independent-minded German Russians, threatened to turn many of them away from the Catholic church. To prevent this, Bishop Shanley called on German-speaking Swiss-American Benedictines. They had built St. John's Abbey at Collegeville, Minnesota, and had been doing missionary work in northern Dakota before Bishop Shanley's arrival in 1889. In 1894, one of the Benedictine missionaries, Abbot Vincent Wehrle, built St. Gall's Priory on the shores of Devils Lake. But St. Gall's was far from the German Russian settlements, and Bishop Shanley wrote: "For God's sake and that of our own Faith, my dear Father Vincent, move your monastery to Richardton, where you will be in the midst of these people." In 1899, Abbot Wehrle moved the priory; Assumption Abbey at Richardton became a center of Catholic work. Abbot Wehrle loved the German Russians and with his kindly, tactful ways conciliated them and made them a pillar of strength for his church. Called the "Apostle of the German-Russians and German-Hungarians," he was proud of the salutation. When he retired as Bishop of Bismarck in 1939, he had done more for the church in his fifty-two years as a priest in North Dakota than

Churches with immigrant members conducted services in many foreign languages; in 1916 there were services in one of thirteen foreign languages in 1,352 churches with a membership of 141,377. Those with services in English included the Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and Baptists—churches whose members were largely Canadian, English, Scottish, and older Americans. They were in a minority position, unable to make much headway with the Scandinavian and German elements in the population. Their natural constituency was often more scattered than that of the immigrant groups, which gave strength to the Catholic and Lutheran churches. They were, therefore, often in a desperate struggle to survive and frequently had to abandon churches and missions. Their weakness is shown by the percentages of membership. In 1916 the Catholics had about 42 percent of all church members, the Lutherans 32 percent, the smaller immigrant churches (the Evangelical Association, the German Evangelical Synod, the Reformed bodies, the Brethren, and the Mennonites) 8 percent, and the older American churches only 18 percent.

The churches did much for the new society developing in North Dakota. They not only brought together neighbors for spiritual refreshment and affable sociability, no matter on the the lonely prairie, but also raised moral standards and established schools and hospitals. Catholic orders took a leading part. In 1885, Benedictine nuns converted the Lamborn Hotel at Bismarck into a hospital and cared for boatmen for ninety cents a day. They renamed the St. Alexius and built a new 125 bed St. Alexius in 1915. At Fargo the Sisters of St. Joseph converted the Bishop's old residence into a hospital in 1899; five years later they built a new hospital for \$50,000. At the invitation of the physicians of Grand Forks, they opened St. Michael's Hospital (\$75,000) in 1907. Other nuns began to operate hospitals: at Fort Yates in 1889, at Dickinson (40-bed St. Joseph's) in 1911, at Minot in 1911 (a new St. Joseph's with 75 beds in 1917-1918), and at Williston (40-bed Mercy Hospital) in 1920.

Norwegian Lutherans were also active in hospital work. In 1899 they bought Dr. J. E. Engstad's private hospital in Grand Forks; it had started in 1892 with 10 beds. Renaming it Grand Forks Deaconess Hospital, they made additions in 1902, 1910, and 1916. They built a number of other hospitals, among them Northwood Deaconess Hospital in 1902. It was converted into an old people's home when they built a new hospital in 1908.

At the urging of Dr. E. P. Quain and Dr. N. O. Ramstad the Evangelical Association, one of the smaller churches in the state, built a \$200,000 hospital in Bismarck in 1909; it was the largest in the state at that time. The Quain-Ramstad clinic and the new hospital made Bismarck a well-equipped medical center for western North Dakota. The hospitals generally trained nurses, and were often run by persons of extraordinary devotion, such as Sister Boniface Tummins, who was

administrator of St. Alexius for forty-two years. And of course the church-sponsored hospitals brought incalculable benefits to the state.

Church-established schools were of less significance. The Presbyterians began Jamestown College in 1883, the Congregationalists Fargo College in 1887, and the Methodists Red River Valley University at Wahpeton in 1891. Roman Catholics and Lutherans established elementary and secondary schools. Nuns opened Catholic academies at Fargo (1882), Jamestown (1890), Bismarck (1878), and a number of other places. Lutherans had Bruflat Academy at Portland in 1889 and Grand Forks College (a secondary school) in 1891, as well as a number of others. By 1912 there were some two dozen private schools in the state, about half of them Catholic and a few of them private business enterprises.

THE GROWTH OF THE SCHOOLS

The early history of North Dakota's schools paralleled that of the churches. Both encountered problems, but the schools had some advantages: unity instead of denominational diversity, taxation instead of voluntary offerings, and compulsory instead of voluntary attendance. Contrariwise, the schools suffered the same difficulties as the churches: too many small units, too little money, and too few trained leaders.

As soon as Dakota Territory was organized, the legislature began to pass school laws. It gradually gave the people a school system: a territorial superintendent of public instruction, county superintendents, a pattern of school districts, and standards for the training and certification of teachers. A law passed in 1883 was especially forward looking. for it required new school districts to be thirty-six square miles, a township, in size. The old districts were nine square miles, four to a township, and in northern Dakota five of the older counties (Barnes, Burleigh, Cass, Grand Forks, and Pembina) retained the smaller districts, a cause of many small, weak schools.

The schools grew rapidly. In 1890, North Dakota had 1,682 schools, 35,543 pupils, and 1,982 teachers; it spent \$658,760 to support them. Statehood brought a large grant of land to support the common schools. In 1889 the federal government gave North Dakota some 2,500,000 acres, Sections 16 and 36 in each township, for that purpose. The state constitution provided that the lands could not be sold for less than ten dollars per acre and that the money received should be a permanent fund with only the interest spent. The income was to be divided among the school districts in proportion to the number of children of school age. By 1917 the state had sold 1,076,000 acres for an average of \$17.61 an acre; the permanent school fund had grown to more than nineteen million dollars and its annual income amounted to more than a million dollars.

As adopted in 1889, the constitution provided for a system of public schools. They were to be "free from sectarian control" and extend through all grades, including the collegiate level. The constitution

provided for a state superintendent of public instruction, county superintendents, and a school debt limit of 5 percent of the assessed valuation.

The legislature carried out the constitutional provisions. It established townships as the common-school districts, except for the five counties where the smaller districts were already in existence. Villages and towns with a population of more than three hundred were to be special school districts, but towns which had been independent districts under territorial law could continue as such. Other laws provided for examinations for teachers' certificates, support of institutes for teacher training, school terms of at least seven months, compulsory attendance for children from eight through fourteen years, and free textbooks at the discretion of school boards.

School enrollments grew with settlement. In 1900 there were some 78,000 children enrolled, by 1920 over 168,000; the number of teachers roughly doubled, rising to about 8,000. Although the rapid expansion was a notable achievement, it gave the state more schools than it was either able or willing to support adequately.

The rural one-room schools were often weak. In 1916-1917 there were 4,722 of them, with 51 percent of all the pupils and well over half of all the teachers. Most of the rural teachers were poorly trained. As late as 1911-1912 only 20 percent of them had received as much as four years of education beyond the eighth grade; more than 3,000 teachers had no training beyond the eighth grade. The school term was short; in 1912 the average length was only 140 days (seven months), and 22 percent of the rural schools taught less than the legal minimum set by the legislature.

Attendance was poor. In 1911-1912 the average pupil in a rural one-room school was there only 84 days. Poor attendance meant many retarded pupils. In Sheridan County, which had a large German Russian element, the average age in any grade in 1911 was three years above the normal age for the grade. As a result, less than 30 percent of the farm boys completed the sixth grade, and in 1912 only four hundred of them were enrolled in high school. Only 1 percent of the farm children were completing high school. Counties with large Norwegian populations tended to have stronger schools.

County superintendents, the professional supervisors of the rural schools, were not much help. Holding an elective office and therefore in politics, they were insecure in their positions, subject to pressure for low standards and the nonenforcement of the school-term and compulsory-attendance laws, and often inexperienced. Half of them were new to their positions in 1907.

Rural schools usually had poor teachers. They often taught a term of seven months for \$260, about 62 percent of the yearly wage of a domestic servant in North Dakota. Most of them were farmers' daughters holding second-grade elementary certificates. In 1916 their average teaching experience was only two years, their average age twenty-three. Each fall,

half the rural teachers were beginners. With some 1,500 rural positions to be filled each school year and with the normal schools graduating only 450, few normal-school graduates would take a rural school. So most rural teachers received what little training they had from county institutes lasting a week or so, from teachers' reading-circle books, and from three to six weeks of summer school. They took examinations for their certificates and usually received a second-grade elementary certificate good for two years. The certification law of 1911 provided professional certificates for the graduates of colleges and normal schools.

The education offered in most of the rural schools was not only of poor quality but also expensive. Low enrollment in many schools made cost per pupil quite high. In 1912 there were ten or fewer pupils in 40 percent of the one-room schools; the daily cost per pupil often ran from forty to eighty cents, as compared with sixteen cents in the Grand Forks town schools. In 1912-1913, North Dakota was spending \$33.52 per adult male of the population on public education, the second largest amount among all the states.

In North Dakota the town schools did not have to struggle with problems created by sparse population and pressure for boys' help on the farm. The town schools were both less costly and better. They had better teachers (93 percent held college or normal-school diplomas in 1918), better attendance (86 percent completed the sixth grade in 1918), longer terms (nine months was the standard), and better buildings and equipment. In 1912 the state's high school teachers were graduates not only of the University of North Dakota and the Agricultural College but also of such eastern colleges and universities as Adrian, Beloit, Carleton, Chicago, Earlham, Michigan, Minnesota, Northwestern, Oberlin, Ohio State, and St. Olaf.⁷ Teachers at graded town and village schools were graduate of a normal schools.

SCHOOL REFORM

A number of strong leaders worked steadily for improvement of the schools. Among them were Webster Merrifield, Walter L. Stockwell, Edwin J. Taylor, and Neil C. Macdonald. Their long tenure increased their influence. Short, dark-complexioned Merrifield, a Yale graduate in classical languages, was president of the University of North Dakota

⁷The biennial reports of the Department of Public Instruction are the principal source of information on the schools. The most useful were those for 1906, 1912, and especially, 1918. See also Bertha R. Palmer, *A Brief History of the Department of Public Instruction, 1860-1932* (Bismarck: Department of Public Instruction, 1932); Norman H. Hanson, "[History of Consolidated Schools in North Dakota](#)" (Unpublished M.S. thesis. University of North Dakota, 1946); United States Bureau of Education, *State Higher Educational Institutions of North Dakota*, Bulletin (1916) No. 27 (Washington, 1917). The last-named item is referred to as the *Craighead Report* for its principal author.

from 1891 to 1909. The enthusiastic, redheaded Stockwell, a graduate of the University of Minnesota, was state superintendent of public instruction from 1903 to 1911. Taylor, who was tall and thin, was a graduate of St. Lawrence University and served as deputy superintendent for Stockwell and then as state superintendent from 1911 to 1917. Dark-haired and heavy-set (five feet nine and over two hundred pounds) Macdonald was a graduate of Mayville Normal who had begun to teach a country school at sixteen. He later earned degrees from the University of North Dakota and Harvard and did graduate work at Chicago and Stanford. He was state inspector of rural and graded schools under Taylor and then state superintendent in 1917 and 1918.

Outspoken about the weaknesses of the schools, these men sought many reforms: larger school districts (the county as the basic unit), a county school board which would choose the county superintendent (taking him out of politics), the consolidation of schools, better-trained teachers, longer school terms, and state aid. Macdonald wrote bluntly:

There are over 15,000 boys on farms in North Dakota, between the ages of 11 and 16 who only see four months' school each year, because those boys... are compelled to do the work of men on the farms.... The country boy, in the average country school has a second-grade teacher—for the well-trained teachers won't go out to the country schools at the wages paid—and a school-room with medieval heating, lighting and ventilation, no library, and a term of seven months. And he is robbed of three months of that.

Merrifield, the greatest hero in the history of the university, used his position as president to bring about improvement of high schools. In 1890 there were only 570 high school students in the state, and nearly all of them were in schools with a curriculum of less than four years. Such schools could not adequately prepare students for college. In the fall of 1891, Merrifield persuaded a conference of high school principals to accept a program which included the classification of high schools, a three-year curriculum as minimum, state subsidies for schools meeting set standards, a high school inspector, and an acceptable course of study. Merrifield became high school inspector. In 1892 he announced that he would send out examination questions to any high school requesting them. Students who passed the examination would be admitted to the freshman class at the university. By 1893 every high school in the state was using the examinations; the university faculty were making out the questions and grading the papers. In 1895 the legislature set up a state high school board, and in 1899 it began to appropriate money for grants to schools which met the standards set by the board. Until his retirement in 1909, Merrifield, the leading member of the board, spent much of his time inspecting high schools. He earned the title "father of the state high school system."

Under Merrifield's watchful eye and encouraged by the state

subsidies, the high schools advanced steadily. In 1899 only 9 met Merrifield's standards for college entrance; in 1909, a total of 76 did so. The number of high school students increased. By 1906, Bismarck had 106, compared with only 8 in 1895, and was boasting that its graduates had gone on to college not only at the University of North Dakota and the Agricultural College but also at Harvard, Oberlin, Minnesota, Carleton, Princeton, and Dartmouth. By 1917-1918, North Dakota had 9,505 high school students, most of them town boys and girls, enrolled in the 144 classified state high schools. The state was spending \$72,500 on subsidies for those schools which met the standards. Grand Forks, with 530 enrolled, had the largest high school in the state. Many high schools, however, were very small. Only 60 had more than 50 students, and less than half the students in the state were enrolled in the 63 first-class high schools. The senior classes were quite small: only 1,369 pupils graduated in 1917; only 11 percent of all pupils finished high school; only 3 percent of the farm boys did so.

The high schools, located in towns, were more easily improved than were the rural common schools. One approach to the rural-school problem was consolidation. Small districts lacked the money to hire good teachers; consolidation would allow a larger school with two teachers and a better program. An 1899 law permitted elections on the consolidation of schools within the same district; later laws permitted consolidation of districts and payment for transportation or pupils. The first consolidated school opened in 1901, and by 1909 there were fifty-one consolidated schools in twenty-one counties.

Many townships never had more than one or two schools, and consolidation was easier where the school districts were already of township size. Transportation—the conquest of distance on the vast, semiarid grassland—was the key to consolidation and hence to the improvement of rural education. Superintendent John C. West, later president of the University of North Dakota, reported that Webster School, consolidated in 1901, found a family system without remuneration to be the best way of transporting pupils: “Horses are plentiful and where the children are too small to drive, there is always a large boy who will take care of this for his board.... When a horse is hitched up, one or two miles, more or less, makes little difference.”

The great turning point for the rural schools came in 1911. A commission headed Dean Joseph Kennedy of Teachers College at the University of North Dakota drafted a complete revision of the state school laws. The legislature enacted the commission's work, a part of the flood of progressive legislation which followed the overthrow of McKenzieism. The laws provided for state aid to raise the standards of rural schools and to encourage consolidation. They also provided for county agricultural high schools and for higher qualifications for teachers.

Under the 1911 laws, state aid was to go to standard rural and graded

schools. Two classes of graded schools, two of rural (one-room) schools, and consolidated schools were eligible for aid. The amount of aid depended upon the preparation of the teachers, the provision of a suitable building and a library, and the length of the school term. For example, graded schools of the first class (four teachers with first-grade elementary certificates and a nine-month term) were to receive \$150 a year; rural schools of the second class (a teacher with a second-grade elementary certificate and an eight-month term) were to receive \$50. In 1915 the legislature appropriated \$120,000 to aid rural schools; in 1919, with the Nonpartisan League in control, it appropriated \$425,000.

The laws of 1911 created the position of rural and graded school inspector and made it the inspector's duty to promote consolidation. State Superintendent Edwin J. Taylor appointed Neil C. Macdonald. Aggressive and full of energy, Macdonald was determined to correct the educational injustices against which he himself had struggled as a farm boy near Hannah, where his father had homesteaded. Speaking often and earnestly, writing pamphlets, reports, and articles ("The New Rural School," "The Consolidated School in North Dakota," "The Problem of Rural School Betterment"), traveling about the state, first as inspector and later as state superintendent, inspiring teachers, county superintendents, and school boards to a higher view of their duties, he put on a far-reaching crusade for the consolidation and improvement of rural schools.

The climax came in the fall of 1917 when Macdonald organized a series of "Better Rural School Rallies" in every county of the state. The rallies were a week's institute for rural teachers and then a one-day conference for school-board members. Macdonald brought in rural-school experts from Boston, Washington, D. C., and Minnesota to aid county superintendents and the state department of education. Governor Lynn J. Frazier, himself a former rural teacher and at one time Macdonald's roommate at the university, spoke at twenty-two of the rallies. More than six thousand teachers and six thousand school-board members attended. The rallies were the most effective campaign for school improvement ever conducted in the state.

Macdonald's zeal, together with state aid and consolidation, brought rapid improvement in the rural schools. In the years from 1911-1912 to 1916-1917, average attendance rose from 84 days to 97; the school term lengthened from 140 days to 156; the percentage of farm children completing the eighth grade increased from 8 percent to 30 percent; the number of farm children in high school increased from 1,115 to 3,920; the number of standard rural schools (those eligible for state aid) increased from 169 to 599; and the number of consolidated schools increased from 114 to 401.

Progress was not uniform. Eastern counties, which had more fertile soil and which had been settled earlier by many Norwegian, Icelandic, Canadian (largely Scotch and Scotch-Irish), and older American settlers,

had stronger schools. Farther west, counties which had less fertile soil and which had been settled later by many German Russians had weaker schools. Counties like Towner, Ramsey, Foster, Ransom, Nelson, Pembina, and Traill had the strongest schools, measured by such criteria as teachers' qualifications, length of school term, eighth-grade and high-school completions, and progress in consolidation and standardization. Such counties as Oliver, Mercer, Logan, McIntosh, Grant, and Emmons had the weakest schools.

Hopeful progress was cut short by the defeat of Macdonald for reelection as state superintendent in 1918. As part of their campaign against the Nonpartisan League, conservatives, opposed to state aid, charged Macdonald with being a socialist and with corrupting the state's children with socialist books. Their candidate, Minnie J. Nielson, took the lead in a campaign of slander and smear. Macdonald had the support of the Nonpartisan League, whose members were much interested in the improvement of rural schools. Miss Nielson, a tallish, pug-nosed young woman, proud of her Scottish origin and an effective speaker, had the support of the North Dakota Federation of Women's Clubs. A former president of that organization, she defeated Macdonald by some five thousand votes.

The state had replaced a dynamic leader and nationally recognized authority on rural education with a state superintendent who was not even a college graduate and hence could not qualify for the state's highest teacher's certificate. It was a misfortune for both the rural schools and the farm boys, whose welfare was so close to Macdonald's heart.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Because boomers established the state's institutions of higher education, these came into being as an anticipation of needs. Like the railroads, towns, churches, schools, and newspapers, they were to help along a speculative boom, to be symbols of the civilization that was to come, a part of the dream of the future.

So it was that George H. Walsh, a land speculator, secured the University of North Dakota for Grand Forks. Walsh, a typical, freewheeling Dakota boomer, had come to Grand Forks in 1875. He founded the *Plaindealer*, the town's first newspaper, and then, out to make a fortune, went into land and banking. He was a member of the territorial council and a friend of Alexander McKenzie and Governor Nehemiah G. Ordway. As a part of the intrigue by which Bismarck secured the territorial capital, some of the legislators of northern Dakota drew lots for the other institutional plums. "I took the University," Walsh recalled years later, "Jamestown the insane asylum and Fargo took the agricultural college. The penitentiary went to Bismarck."

When the convention framed the constitution in 1889, it also divided the spoils. The members from Cass County were determined to have the agricultural college, which, though authorized earlier, had not been

established because of a lack of appropriations. The members from Burleigh County were determined to keep the capital. Cass and Burleigh combined forces and promised institutions to almost every town in eastern North Dakota, the only portion then settled. So the constitution kept the capital at Bismarck, the university at Grand Forks, and the insane asylum at Jamestown; it gave Fargo an agricultural college, Mayville and Valley City normal schools, Mandan a reform school, Wahpeton a school of science, Ellendale an industrial school, Lisbon an old soldiers' home, Pembina County a school for the blind, Devils Lake a school for the deaf and dumb, and some place in Rolette, Ward, McHenry, or Bottineau counties a school of forestry. The young state had more institutions that it needed.

These were established very slowly. The university had opened in 1884. The normal schools at Valley City and Mayville and the Agricultural College got under way in 1890. But not until the more prosperous times of the second boom did other open: the Industrial and Normal School at Ellendale in 1899, the School of Science at Wahpeton in 1904, the School of Forestry at Bottineau in 1907. Authorized by later constitutional amendments, a normal school at Minot opened in 1913, as did another at Dickinson in 1918.

Since there were few high schools in the state, almost all of the early students began with preparatory work or with practical courses at the Agricultural College. At the university there were only 20 college students and 179 enrollees in the preparatory department in 1888-1889.⁸ As the number of high schools increased, so did the number of high school graduates entering state institutions. Except for those at the university, however, the great majority of incoming students were not high school graduates, even in 1914.

Enrollment rose rapidly. In 1884-1885, the first year, there were only 79 students in the state's one institution; in 1917-1918 there were 3,409 students in eight state institutions. There were 278 graduates before 1900, 2,052 from 1900 to 1910, and 2,430 from 1910 to 1915, a spectacular increase. By 1916-1917 the eight institutions had an income of \$800,000 (some \$200,000 from the land grants) and the value of their campuses, buildings, and equipment was over \$3,000,000.

Expansion can from the prosperity of the second boom and the efforts of able leaders. At Fargo, John H. Worst, president from 1895 to 1916, and a remarkable group of teachers and researchers built an excellent college and experiment state. Born in a log cabin on an Ohio farm, Worst had farmed, taught country school, and homesteaded in Emmons County, North Dakota. He also served as county superintendent of schools, sat in the North Dakota Legislature, campaigned for the Republican party, had been a lieutenant governor before becoming

⁸Agnes McCorkell Stee, "[History of the Minot State Teachers College](#)" (Unpublished M.S. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1948), p. 26.

president of the Agricultural College. Kindly, patient, and a practical farmer himself, Worst could explain scientific developments to farm audiences without talking down to them.

Worst's predecessor, Horace E. Stockbridge, had gathered a young, enthusiastic faculty: Clare B. Waldron, twenty-four, a horticulturist from Michigan; Henry L. Balley, twenty-four, a botanist from Indiana; and Edwin F. Ladd, thirty-one, a chemist from Maine. They and others were to serve the state well.

At the normal school in Mayville, bearded, experienced Joseph Carhart, with his black skullcap, brought a golden age. He was considered one of the ablest normal-school administrators in the nation. Usher L. Burdick, class of 1900, was long to remember Cathcart's warm interest in him. At Valley City, young George A. McFarland from Chagrin Falls, Ohio, taking charge at thirty-four, made that school a success. At the university, two capable presidents and an aggressive member of the board of trustees gave leadership. Webster Merrifield, a small, bearded, almost shy bachelor professor of Greek at Yale, had come to the university when it opened in 1884. He served as president from 1891 to 1909 and molded the struggling college into a true university.

Merrifield was aided by his close friend William Budge, a member of the board of trustees from 1891 to 1907. Born in the Orkney Islands, Billy Budge had come to Canada as a youth to work for the Hudson's Bay Company but soon drifted across the border into northern Dakota. He ran a stage station in the Red River Valley, fought Indians, freighted to the Black Hills, and then turned to land speculation. With his partner, Jake Eshelman, Budge acquired considerable land in the Grand Forks townsite. When the Great Dakota Boom swelled the population, he found himself, though barely thirty, one of the wealthy men of the region. He was a big, florid, rough self-made man with a reputation for unscrupulous maneuvering, yet he had a fund of hearty good humor and a respect for the education and culture he himself had missed. His sincere interest in the university (for years he visited Merrifield daily), his aggressive energy, and his close connections with the dominant McKenzie machine contributed to Merrifield's success.

When in 1895 Governor Roger Allin's veto of appropriations threatened the existence of the university, Budge led in raising, by private subscription, the \$26,000 which saved it. On one occasion he paid its fuel bill (\$700) out of his own pocket. When the second boom made expansion possible, he devised unorthodox methods of securing funds for new buildings—borrowing against the land grant and against future appropriations. The courts, however, soon declared such devices unconstitutional. Governor Frank White, who thought the university was receiving larger appropriations than it needed, once said to Merrifield:

I don't know what to do with Billy Budge. As a member of the Board

of Trustees of the University he rides rough shod over the laws of the state and even of the constitution. Technically, he ought to be sent to the penitentiary, but he comes down here at the beginning of each new session, throws his arms around the legislators and gives them a big hug, and instead of prosecuting Billy as they ought, they say, "Oh well, Billy is a good fellow, let's give him what he wants," and that's the end of it.

Thus aided by Budge and other friends, the university survived the depression of the 1890's and then expanded in the second boom. From 1899 to 1915 it put up a dozen buildings. Merrifield, and later Frank L. McVey, built up a faculty of Ph.D. specialists trained in the best graduate schools: Orin G. Libby (history, Wisconsin), Arthur G. Leonard (geology, Johns Hopkins), James E. Boyle (economics and political science, Wisconsin), John M. Gillette (sociology, Chicago), Albert Hoyt Taylor (physics, Göttingen), and George Abbott (chemistry, Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Others, too, were outstanding: Harvard-trained dramatist Frederick Koch, ground-water expert Howard Simpson, mathematician Elwyn Chandler, poet Gottfried Hult, lignite researcher Earle J. Babcock. The faculty was young, energetic, and ambitious.

The creation of professional schools transformed the small liberal arts college into a university: the School of Law (1899), the School of Mines (1901), the College of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering (1901), the Normal College (1901), and the School of Medicine (1905). The library grew from 8,000 volumes in 1899 to 56,000 in 1916. When the preparatory department became the model school for practice teaching in 1908, all sub-college work came to an end except that given in the summer for teachers.

After 1909, President Frank McVey continued Merrifield's work. A Yale graduate like Merrifield (he held a Ph.D. in economics), McVey had taught at the University of Minnesota, had published three books and twenty articles, and had served for three years on the Minnesota Tax Commission. Only thirty-nine when he took over the presidency, he was well over six feet in his English tweeds, bursting with vitality, and a polished speaker. Though somewhat standoffish, he had a flair for administration and an insatiable desire to learn.

McVey emphasized faculty writing. Under his leadership the faculty published twenty books in eight years, and in 1909 the university established the *Quarterly Journal* to stimulate professorial creativity. The university's academic excellence was recognized when Phi Beta Kappa installed a chapter on the campus in 1914. By 1914-1915, twenty-three of the eighty-two faculty members held doctor's degrees; there were seven at the Agricultural College and only three others on the faculties of the various state institutions.

The Agricultural College steadily expanded its offerings: mechanical engineering (1897), steam engineering (1898), history and

social science (1899), pharmacy (1902), veterinary medicine, education, and civil engineering (all in 1908), chemical engineering (1910), and architecture (1912).

All of the state institutions trained teachers. The Agricultural College and the university trained high school teachers; the normal schools and the normal department of the university trained elementary teachers. Yet by 1916 the total number of graduates of the normal schools was only about one-sixth of the number of teachers in the state, and the normals were supplying only about one-eighth of the new teachers employed each year.

The institutions, quite naturally and inevitably, did not serve all parts of the state equally. In 1914-1915 almost 54 percent of their North Dakota students came from the eight counties in which the institutions were located, counties which had only 28 percent of the state's population. The university, the Agricultural College, and Valley City Normal, however, drew students from the whole state.

Probably the most important services of the Agricultural College were the research of its experiment station and the short winter courses in practical agriculture. shopwork, power machinery. and homemaking. In 1915-1916, thirty-nine men were engaged in research, and the work of Edwin F. Ladd, Henry L. Bolley, Lawrence R. Waldrom, and others on a flour milling, flax wilt, the eradication fo the Russian thistle, adulteration, and new varieties of wheat was known throughout North Dakota. The college had five substations and twenty-two demonstration farms scattered over the state; county agents were spreading its influence everywhere. In 1914-1915 the college had 518 students in sub-collegiate short courses and 319 taking college work. Only a third of the college students were in agriculture.

The Agricultural College was disturbed by the firing of its president, John H. Worst, in February, 1916. The efforts of conservatives to control the institution had begun at the meeting which organized the Better Farming Association in November, 1911. The bankers present criticized Professor Henry L. Bolley for his bulletins and addresses exposing the diseased condition of the soil and the prevalence of smut, flax wilt, and potato scab. Such publicity was causing eastern capitalists to question investments in farm mortgages in North Dakota. At that time, North Dakota bankers were obtaining eastern money at 6 percent and lending it to farmers at 10 percent. They naturally wanted Bolley fired or shut up, but Worst defended him.

In sympathy with the attack on Bolley, the board of trustees of the college took control of the experiment station and the extension service away from Worst. On July 1, 1914, they made Thomas Cooper director of both branches and independent of Worst. Cooper was the man the bankers and Twin City interests had made director of the Better Farming Association; it was now merged with the college.

Cooper at once set out to harass Bolley, locking him out of his

laboratories and depriving him of funds specifically granted to support his research. For four years the experiment station published nothing of Bolley's work. But Bolley, who had been active in exposing the methods by which farmers were cheated by the grain trade, did not resign. After talking with Bolley about the experience a few years later, Upton Sinclair described him as "a long, lean, keen old gentleman, a demon for the hunting out of knowledge, and an untamed champion of the people's cause."

As Cooper harassed Bolley, the board of trustees fired Worst while he was away in Washington in November, 1914; that is, they made Worst president emeritus (he had served the college for twenty years as president) and elected Edwin F. Ladd president. But Ladd would not take the presidency unless the change was acceptable to Worst, and Worst refused to resign.

In January, 1915, the legislature passed a bill setting up a board of regents to control all state institutions of higher education. Until then, each one had had its own board of trustees. Governor Louis B. Hanna appointed only conservative Republicans to the new board. All but one were bankers, and Lewis F. Crawford was the chairman.

In January, 1916, Worst expressed open sympathy for the Nonpartisan League in a widely publicized address; in February he proposed a reorganization of the Agricultural College which would make the directors of the experiment station and of the extension service (Cooper in both instances) subordinate to the president of the college. The proposal was a good one, but the board of regents feared that Worst would use his increased authority to dismiss Cooper. On February 28 it discharged Worst and made Ladd president. Ladd was no conservative and no friend of Cooper, but he had much prestige in the state and could not be ignored. A little later, charges of unprofessional conduct were brought against Professor Bolley. He was exonerated and his accusers dismissed. Although Worst's reorganization plan was accepted, Cooper stayed on as director of the experiment station until 1917, when he became dean of the college. Commenting on the turmoil, Ladd said that the college had been "the football of politics" for seven years.⁹ Yet for all the trouble, its services to North Dakota had continued.

The university also served the state well. Redheaded and enthusiastic Earle J. Babcock, coming to the university at twenty-four, soon made his laboratory "a testing room" for the state. He began to investigate lignite and clay deposits as early as 1890. In 1901 his first report as state geologist, elaborately illustrated and summarizing ten years' research, described North Dakota's vast lignite deposits and optimistically discussed their future possibilities. The *Bismarck Tribune* called it "one of the best public documents ever issued in the state."

⁹Upton Sinclair, *The Goose-Step: A Study of American Education* (Pasadena: The Author, 1923), pp. 198-205.

The investigation of lignite, long continued, was supplemented by other services. The university established a public-health laboratory in 1907; it set up a biological laboratory at Devils Lake and a lignite briquetting plant at Hebron in 1909. Professor Arthur G. Leonard mapped the natural resources of North Dakota. As its secretary, Professor Orin G. Libby made the State Historical Society's library and museum at Bismarck a great storehouse of materials dealing with the state's history; he published many valuable documents in the society's *Collections*. President Webster Merrifield took the lead in establishing the state's high schools. President Frank L. McVey, desiring to make the university an important factor in the life of the state, said in his inaugural address: "It should be the medium through which statistics are gathered, information collected, advice given, problems solved, in fact a real part of the state government."

The university's greatest service, however, was the high-caliber educational opportunity it afforded the state's young men and women, many of them the children of immigrants from isolated farms and small towns. One student wrote in 1898: "The one thing that is done here is to study; here *everyone* studies; here everyone talks of study; here the days and hours are laid off in regard to study." The faculty took a deep interest in the students. Merrifield watched their morals and at one time had several thousand dollars lent out to students without interest. One student wrote: "I hereby pledge President Merrifield that I will not taste intoxicating liquor in any form so long as I am a student at the university." In two years, 1916-1918, Frederick Koch's students wrote twenty-eight plays and produced seventeen.

A few years earlier, Koch had taught Maxwell Anderson, the son of an itinerant Baptist minister. Graduating in 1911, Anderson became one of the most gifted playwrights of contemporary America, the writer of such fine plays as *What Price Gory?* (with Laurence Stallings), *Elizabeth the Queen*, *Mary of Scotland*, and *Winterset*. Anderson, looking back some fifty years to the fall when he had enrolled, wrote a love letter to the university in 1958. He believed that it had been "a retreat for those more interested in the creation of beauty or the discovery of truth than in making a profit." He thanked the university for being there when he had "needed it so badly": "If I hadn't gone to the university I might have been an unhappy and mediocre banker, farmer, or store-keeper. I'd have gone no farther."¹⁰

The opportunities offered by the university meant much to others as well. Many of its graduates became high school teachers, lawyers, and donors throughout the state. From those of the 1890's came two governors, two United States senators, and two state supreme court judges. On the great football team of 1899 were William Lemke, Lynn J. Frazier (captain), and William L. Nuessle—all to become prominent

¹⁰[*University of North Dakota Alumni Review*](#), December 5, 1958.

state leaders. Seven of the eleven governors elected from 1916 to 1960 were graduates of the university: Frazier, Ragnvold A. Nestos, George F. Shafer, William Langer, John Moses, Fred G. Aandahl, and John E. Davis. Many graduates won prominence outside the state, among them Thomas Campbell, the world's largest wheat farmer; John M. Hancock, president of Jewel Tea Company and a partner of Lehman Brothers of New York; Maxwell Upson, president of the Concrete Pile Company of New York; Charles W. Boise, mining engineer with Selection Trust Limited of London; John S. Lundy, head of anesthesia at the Mayo Clinic; and J. F. T. O'Connor, comptroller of the currency under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Unfortunately, North Dakota had too many institutions of higher education, more than it needed or could adequately support, an excess which sprang from each large town's desire to have one. Once established, the newer schools sought to expand their programs, to crowd into fields already occupied by older institutions. So they fought among themselves for students and appropriations. There were not enough of either to go around.

When the normal schools opened in 1890, enrollment at the university fell off. Throughout the 1890's the four institutions fought to stay alive. In 1893, Webster Merrifield wrote Governor Eli C. D. Shortridge that the university was "doomed." The Governor replied: "The Agricultural College will do all they can to defeat you." When Governor Roger Allin vetoed most of the appropriations for high education in 1895, he expected all of the schools except the Agricultural College, which had federal funds, to close. When better times came after 1898, four more schools were established to share the available appropriations. The struggle became so intense that a legislative committee in 1915 found "too great a disposition of those in control of our educational institutions to disregard or forget the financial conditions of this state."

But the blame lay with the state for creating schools for which there was little justification. By 1916-1917, three institutions—the university, the Agricultural College, and Valley City Normal School—had 85 percent of the seventeen hundred students doing college work. The normal schools were largely high schools for the counties in which they were located; at Ellendale, the worst example, the Industrial and Normal School was providing the last two years of high school work for the town. At Bottineau the School of Forestry, finding slight demand for its courses, had become a sort of business college; in 1914-1915 all but eleven of its students came from Bottineau County. At Wahpeton the School of Science, with little or no demand for courses to train skilled workmen (its avowed purpose), was largely a commercial school.

Small classes revealed the overexpansion which prevailed. At the eight institutions during a week in April, 1916, there were 662 class meetings with only four or fewer students in attendance; this was 21

percent of all class meetings. Some 42 percent of the classes had less than ten students. The Agricultural College and the schools at Ellendale, Wahpeton, and Bottineau had the most small classes; the normal schools at Valley City, Mayville, and Minot had the least. The normal schools, however, had many special courses, preparing specialists in such fields as public-school art, with only a few students.

Overexpansion brought much unjustified duplication. Still admitting eighth-grade graduates in the 1920's, the normal schools duplicated the work of the high schools. The former wanted to train high school teachers and thereby duplicate the work of the university and the Agricultural College in that field, an ambition which was satisfied in the 1920's. The university, in turn, duplicated the work of the normals in training elementary teachers. And the Agricultural College and the university duplicated each other's work in the expensive field of engineering, in which both institutions had many very small classes.

The overexpansion of state institutions made survival difficult for church-sponsored colleges. In 1906 the Methodists' Red River Valley University gave up its independent existence at Wahpeton and became affiliated with the University of North Dakota as Wesley College. Fargo College, the Congregational school, gave up in 1919. Jamestown College had closed in 1893, and its lone building became a ruin, the hilltop campus a pasture. Then came a miracle. Dutch-born, dynamic young Barend H. Kroeze, its new Presbyterian pastor-president, reopened the college in 1909 and began a persistent drive for gifts. His dedication to Christian education secured money from atheist Andrew Carnegie as well as from many North Dakotans. By 1913, Kroeze had erected seven buildings (he had been an architect before his ordination) and had secured an enrollment of 249 students.

Although no state institution closed, overexpansion weakened the stronger ones by diverting funds to the others. Requests from the schools always outran appropriations. On short rations, all were handicapped, and the weaker ones had too many young, ill-prepared, inexperienced, and poorly paid teachers. In 1913-1914 North Dakota was ninth among the states in per capita expenditures for higher education, but overexpansion was robbing it of the quality of education its expenditure could have bought.

There was some realization of the problem. To eliminate duplication and competition, the legislature established a single board of regents in 1915 to govern all of the schools, which had been supervised by separate boards before. The legislature also ordered an investigation of all state institutions of higher education and engaged three outside experts to conduct it: Dr. William T. Bawden of the United States Bureau of Education, Dean Lotus D. Coffman of the University of Minnesota College of Education, and Dr. Edwin B. Craighead, former president of the University of Montana. Although their report took cognizance of the many small classes and tried to eliminate duplication, it came to nothing.

Just as settlement quickly brought churches, schools, and colleges to North Dakota, so, too, did it bring newspapers. Walrus-mustached Colonel Clement A. Lounsberry started the first one, the *Bismarck Tribune*, in July, 1873. A handsome and enterprising young Minnesota newspaperman, he had seen much bloody fighting in the Civil War and had been made a colonel of a Michigan regiment on his twenty-second birthday. The first train to enter Bismarck brought in his printing press.

It was easy to start a paper. A printer with a shirttailful of type and an old Washington handpress was soon in business, often encouraged by a townsite promoter. Thus William G. Fargo of Wells, Fargo and Company offered a bonus of five hundred dollars for the establishment of a paper to be named the *Fargo Express*. It appeared on January 1, 1874, the second newspaper in northern Dakota. In 1875, George H. Walsh, a printer then working for a Red River steamboat company, started the *Grand Forks Plaindealer*, bringing in the printing equipment he had formerly used for the defunct *West St. Paul News*.

The Great Dakota Boom (1878-1886) brought a flood of newspapers. Most of them were weeklies, but the *Fargo Argus*, founded in 1879 and financed by James J. Hill, who had just organized the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad, was a daily, the first in northern Dakota. It was edited by Alanson W. Edwards. By 1880 northern Dakota had ten weeklies and one daily. In 1881 the *Grand Forks Herald* became the second daily. George B. Winship had founded it as a weekly in 1879, hauling the press and type by wagon from southeastern Minnesota. At the peak of the boom from one to three newspapers were being established every week. By 1884, Bismarck alone had seven, counting both the morning and evening editions of the *Tribune*. In 1889, North Dakota had 125 newspapers.

There was a lull in the 1890's, although Major Edwards and Horatio C. Plumley started the *Fargo Forum* in 1891. Then, in the exciting years of the second boom, many newspapers were born. In 1899 the state had 143 newspapers, nine of them dailies; by 1909 it had 333 papers, including twelve dailies. Newspapers were being published at 267 places in the state, although there were only 211 incorporated towns and villages. Many very small places had papers, and Dogden, with a population of eighty, had two.

The booms created the newspapers, and the newspapers, in turn, did all they could to help the booms. They put out special editions and sent them to the East to advertise the new country. In 1885 the *North Dakota Siftings* (Minnewaukan) printed an "immigration edition" of ten thousand copies, working fourteen days to run it off the hand press.

Just as many papers were established to promote a town or region, so, too, were they started in order to reap a harvest from publication of the legal notices necessary for proving up homestead claims. The

railroads, as interested as the newspapers in promoting settlement, kept the editors friendly with free passes. They provided free transportation for newspapermen going on the annual junkets arranged by the North Dakota Press Association. In 1890 the association went to Glacier National Park.¹¹

Besides the English-language papers, there were a few published in Norwegian and German. The Norwegian papers *Tidende* and *Normanden* were published in Grand Forks, the *Posten* and *Fram* in Fargo. The *Normanden*, with a circulation of 9,216 in 1910, was the most influential. By 1918 the circulation was down to 6,790. It had been founded as a weekly in 1887 and was edited by H. A. Foss. Some of the seven German papers were *Der Volkfreund* (established at Richardton in 1903), the *Deutscher Pionier* (established at New Salem in 1905), *Der Staats-Anzeiger* (Rugby, 1905), and the *Nord-Dakota Herold* (Bismarck, 1907). In addition to the German-language papers, the *Harvey Herald*, the *Ashley Tribune*, the *Hazen Star*, and others had some pages printed in German, and the *Wishek News* published a German edition called the *Nachrichten*. Most of the German papers were short lived, and the *Nord-Dakota Herold*, a Catholic paper, was moved from place to place, finally being published in Dickinson. The strongest one was *Der Staats-Anzeiger*, an interdenominational paper with a circulation of 2,538 in 1910.

German newspapers flourished during the first decade of the twentieth century. They stressed Americanization, religion, and education and helped Germans to find land and to become citizens. Frank L. Brandt, editor of *Der Staats-Anzeiger*, moved it from Rugby to Bismarck in 1912. When the First World War came, anti-German feeling made trouble for the German papers. Some died, and the *Nord-Dakota Herold* was printed for a time in English. But Brandt, though threatened, refused to print in English. The front of *Der Staats-Anzeiger* plant was twice painted yellow. By 1934 the only German-language newspapers still being published were the *Nord-Dakota Harold* and *Der Staats-Anzeiger*.

North Dakota newspapers presented a varied picture. All were heavily political. Most were Republican, although there were a few outspoken Democratic papers. such as the *Bathgate Pink Sheet*, the *Bowman County News*, and the *Minot Democrat*. In the 1890's the

¹¹Important sources on newspapers are George B. Winship, "Newspapers of the Red River Valley," in *History of the Red River Valley: Past and Present* (2 vols.; Grand Forks: Herald Printing Company, 1909), I, 441-449; Wendell W. Norris, "The Transient Frontier Weekly as a Stimulus to Homesteading," *Journalism Quarterly*, XXX (Winter 1953), 44-48; John C. Sim, "[The History of the North Dakota Press Association, 1886-1940](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1940); Fred W. Gross, "[Type and Nature of the German Publications in North Dakota](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1934).

Jamestown Alert and the *Steele Ozone* supported William Jennings Bryan and free silver. Newspapers were established, combined, moved from one town to another, and sold with rapidity. Many soon disappeared.

Newspapers reflected the rough society of which they were apart. The early *Bismarck Tribune* was full of advertisements placed by saloons, dance halls, and sporting houses. Social items in the *Grand Forks Herald* sometimes implied haste in weddings and spoke frankly and often uncomplimentary of the personal affairs of its readers. Alcoholics were “drunks” and Negroes “coons” in its columns. In all papers, scandal and stories of rape, murder, and divorce were common. All were free speaking and all fiercely loyal to their towns and localities.

The newspapers displayed enterprise in fulfilling their functions. The weeklies, most of them with circulations under one thousand, had patent insides, but they subscribed to a Washington letter and gave some national and world news. The dailies belonged to the Associated Press and other news services. The largest came to have substantial circulations and a considerable investment; the *Grand Forks Herald* was capitalized at \$100,000 before 1909 and had its own large building. All did job printing. By 1890 there were 207 imprints in North Dakota, books, pamphlets, and broadsides, and 64 places had printing presses.

The largest and most influential papers before the First World War were the *Grand Forks Herald*, the *Fargo Argus*, and the *Fargo Forum*. The *Argus*, after prospering for a time under Major Alanson W. Edwards, was absorbed by the *Fargo Morning Call* about 1898. The *Herald's* circulation declined after the founding of the *Grand Forks Evening Times* by a pro-McKenzie group headed by Senator Henry C. Hansbrough in 1906. In 1910, the leading dailies in circulation were the *Fargo Forum* with 12,694, the *Grand Forks Herald* with 10,427, and the *Minot Optic* with 4,150. Five places had two daily papers each in 1910: Valley City, Minot, Jamestown, Grand Forks, and Fargo. The circulation of many dailies was quite small. That of the *Devils Lake Journal*, then a Democratic paper, was only 1,800, and that of the *Valley City Times-Record* was estimated at 1,000.

In the years up to about 1910 the leading newspapermen in the state were Alanson W. Edwards, George B. Winship, Horatio C. Plumley, John J. Jordan, and Marshall H. Jewell. All came from states farther east, where they had learned the printer's trade as young men and had worked on a number of papers. All were interested and active in political life. Edwards, born in Ohio, had served in the Civil War, taking part in Sherman's march to the sea and becoming a major at twenty-four. Before he came to Fargo in 1878 to start the *Fargo Republican*, he had run a newspaper in Illinois, had been a warden of the state penitentiary in Joliet, and had taken part in the Black Hills gold rush. A big, overweight, restless, belligerent editor with the walrus-mustache of the time, he was backed on the *Fargo Argus* by James J. Hill and was allied with

Alexander McKenzie. He became an important man in Fargo: mayor, superintendent of the territorial census, and member of the legislature. A companionable fat man, Edwards lived in a big ten-room house, had a large library, drove a spirited race horse, like to read Robert Burns' poems and Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* aloud to his large family (six boys and one girl), and, proud of having been with Sherman, relished the song *Marching Through Georgia*. He left Fargo in 1900 to become United States consul at Montreal, but retained an interest in the *Forum* until his death in 1908.

Edwards' associate of the *Argus* and later on the *Forum* was Horatio C. Plumley, a Vermonter who had learned the printer's trade while working as "devil" on paper in New York State. A Republican, Mason, president of the state press association, and holder of state offices, he managed the *Forum* for many years.

George B. Winship of the *Grand Forks Herald*, a follower of Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin, had started the revolution of 1906, which broke McKenzie's power. He retired in 1911 and moved to California.

John J. Jordan was associated with a series of newspapers in Fargo. He purchased the *Republican* in 1883 and sold it to Edwards in 1895, when it was combined with the *Forum*. He then served as editor of the *Argus* until 1898, when he founded the *Morning Call*. A strong-minded man and a good moral influence, Jordan was born in Canada, the son of a blacksmith, and had worked in the mechanical department of the old *Minneapolis Atlas* and its successor, the *Tribune*, for twenty-one years before coming to Fargo.

Another important newspaper editor was Marshall H. Jewell of the *Bismarck Tribune*. Born in New York State, the son of a newspaperman, he early learned the printer's trade and worked on Chicago papers before coming to Bismarck in 1878 to help Clement A. Lounsberry with the *Tribune*. Jewell bought the paper from Lounsberry in 1884 and published it until his death in 1911. Edwards wrote of him in 1889: "Jewell is the model newspaperman of North Dakota; modest, pleasant, affable and accommodating, he has no superior in the niche he occupies." Like Edwards, Jewell was an ally of McKenzie and active in Republican politics; he was secretary of the Republican state committee in 1893 and again in 1896. The *Bismarck Tribune* did much printing for the state government. In 1903, for example, it had more than thirteen thousand dollars' worth, or almost 60 percent, of the public printing. The *Tribune* had a circulation of about two thousand in 1910.¹²

WRITERS AND BOOKS

Most of the writing done in and about North Dakota appeared in the

¹²Biographical sketches of some newspapermen are in [*Compendium of History and Biography of North Dakota*](#) (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle and Company, 1900).

newspapers, but actually it all began with the arrival of white men in the region. The first literary effort sprang from curiosity about the strange country and a desire to record adventures there. The Sieur de La Vérendrye, the first white man to visit the area, came because of his curiosity about rumors of a westward-flowing river. His report, compiled in 1739, is the oldest written record dealing with North Dakota. Thomas Jefferson's curiosity about the western country led to the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Its journals, containing more information about North Dakota than any other portion of the expedition's route, were first published in 1814. They were the first widely circulated and detailed account of the region.

A number of other men matched Lewis and Clark in keeping journals of their travels in North Dakota. Some were naturalists, some fur traders, some sportsmen. In 1811, Henry M. Brackenridge, a young lawyer from St. Louis, accompanied Manuel Lisa to the Knife River villages; his *Journal of a Voyage up the Missouri, Performed in 1811* (1814) describes keelboat travel. Romantic artist George Catlin visited Fort Union in 1832; his book *North American Indians* (1841) is profusely illustrated with reproductions of his paintings. Many others kept records which were later published, preserving myriad details: John Bradbury, a Scottish botanist, came in 1811; Thomas Say, geologist and zoologist, in 1823; John James Audubon, world-famous ornithologist, in 1813; John Palliser, an English sportsman, in 1818-1849; and Henry Boller, an adventurer, from 1858 to 1866.

The most valuable description was written by Maximilian, Prince of Wied. A German scientist, he had dreamed on the battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars of discovering new species of plants and animals in the New World. Making up a very important part of his book *Travels in the Interior of North America in the Years 1832 to 1834* (German edition, 1839-1841; English translation, 1843) is an account of a winter spent at the Knife River villages. Maximilian's companion was a young Swiss artist, Karl Bodmer, who made an outstanding series of paintings and drawings of the Indians. During the winter, he and Maximilian lived in a cabin within the stockade of Fort Clark. Before spring, Maximilian, a slender man with some of his teeth missing (he wore a black velvet coat and extremely greasy trousers), nearly died of scurvy, but he had recorded his observations of the Indians, a significant contribution to science.

Men like Audubon and Maximilian were only visitors, but the fur traders, more or less permanent residents, were also moved to record the adventurous life of which they were a part. David Thompson, Charles Chaboillez, Alexander Henry, Charles MacKenzie, John C. Luttig, and Francis A. Chardon kept journals. These were not, of course, published until many years later. One trader even wrote his reminiscences in his old age: *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri: The Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833-1872* (1898), a two-volume work

edited by Elliott Coues. And Father George A. Belcourt produced a Chippewa grammar which was published in 1839.

The establishment of military posts in the North Dakota region brought in a new group, some of whom wrote accounts of what they saw. At Fort Stevenson, General Philippe Régis de Trobriand, a French-born officer in the United States Army, kept a diary and made sketches. At Fort Abraham Lincoln, while his fellow officers drank and played cards, Colonel George A. Custer (he was brevet major general of volunteers), the hard-riding and abstemious commander of the Seventh Cavalry, wrote articles for *Galaxy*, a popular monthly. They appeared later in book form as *My Life on the Plains* (1874). After Custer's death at the Little Big Horn, his widow, Elizabeth Bacon Custer, wrote *Boots and Saddles; or, Life in Dakota with General Custer* (1885). It became a classic.

Stationed at Fort Buford for six years, Dr. Washington Matthews, an army surgeon of genuine scientific bent, compiled *Grammar and Dictionary of the Hidatsa* (1873) and *Ethnology and Philology of the Hidatsa* (1877). A friend of Matthews and also an army doctor, Elliott Coues did much research on the bird life of the state. He was secretary and naturalist of the United States Northern Boundary Commission, 1873-1876. Later he edited and arranged for the publication of many early journals, such as those of Alexander Henry and David Thompson.

Each phase of North Dakota life produced a literary counterpart. Thus Theodore Roosevelt turned his adventures in the Badlands into a book entitled *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1888). But Joseph Henry Taylor's record was more unusual. After a stint as a soldier in the Civil War, young Taylor, a Quaker printer from eastern Pennsylvania, published a Democratic newspaper for a short time at Yankton. Then, in 1869, he took up a career as a hunter and trapper in the Painted Woods region north of Bismarck. Twenty years later, though a shy, retiring man, he began to put his experiences into a series of books, composing them as he set the type by hand, then printing and binding them. In this way he published *Sketches of Frontier and Indian Life* (1889), *Twenty Years on the Trap Line* (1891), *Kaleidoscopic Lives* (1902), and *Beaver: Their Ways and Other Sketches* (1902). Taylor died in 1908 in his small printing shop at Washburn.

North Dakota writing was largely a description of experiences, but as the period of frontier adventure passed, some men began to produce works of fiction and other types of literature. H. A. Foss, editor of the Norwegian *Normanden*, wrote romantic novels. Farmer-poet Jon Norstog wrote long biblical dramas in Norwegian—*Moses*, *Israel*, and *Saul*—setting them in type by his own hand and printing them on his own press in a shanty on the prairie.¹³

¹³Lincoln Colcord, Introduction to [*Giants in the Earth*](#), by O. E. Rølvaag (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), p. xxxiv.

In the years before the First World War, North Dakota's one professional literary man was James W. Foley, the poet laureate of the state. A slender, friendly, precocious youngster, he grew up at Bismarck and Medora and began to punch cattle on the range. Foley was more interested in writing poetry, however, and when the *Bad Lands Cow Boy* published some of his verses, other publications reprinted them. The *New York Times* sent him his first literary check in 1889 when he was only fifteen. In few years he was working for Marshall H. Jewell on the *Bismarck Tribune* and selling his poems to the *Youth's Companion*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and other national magazines. The *Bismarck Tribune* published the first volume of his poetry soon after 1900. Foley became a greatly beloved person. His most famous poem, "A Letter Home," was written in 1906 for a special immigration edition of the *Fargo Forum* and celebrated the wholesomeness and freedom of the state. Foley himself, however, moved to California about 1915 to become poet-columnist for the *Pasadena Star-News*; he became one of the most popular speakers in that state. In 1924, North Dakota began to celebrate his birthday as "Foley Day," to be observed annually; in 1926, Foley wrote "North Dakota," later adopted as the state song. Before he died in 1939, he had turned out thirteen volumes of folksy, optimistic poetry.

READINGS AND LIBRARIES

Reading matter came to the northern Dakota country with the first white men. At the Knife River villages in 1796, John Evans borrowed European magazines from the British traders then crossing the prairies from the Assiniboine forts. Alexander Henry had a library of sorts at his Pembina post soon after 1801, and the keelboats and steamboats ascending the Missouri carried newspapers, books, and magazines. The military posts had books; Generals George A. Custer and Philippe de Trobriand, as well as many another officer and enlisted man, liked to read. Farming settlers brought books with them, sometimes substantial libraries. The Norwegians, a reading people, packed books in their trunks before setting out for the New World. In some of their settlements in North Dakota, the books in the public libraries were mostly in Norwegian. Others also loved books; R. B. Griffith, pioneer Grand Forks merchant, built up a large private library. And Bismarck had a bookstore in the 1870's.

Reading was a habit in early North Dakota. It was long the custom in Icelandic families to sit around the fireplace during the long winter evenings, the mother knitting, the father reading aloud from some saga or modern Icelandic poet. Every community had some well-educated men and women who were eager to re-create the cultural fabric of the older parts of the country. They soon set up theaters, lecture circuits, music groups, literary societies, and study clubs.

Libraries grew out of such activities. Women's clubs provided their

members with books and magazines. In Grand Forks and Fargo the Young Men's Christian Association had reading rooms. Sometimes local chapters of the Farmers' Alliance maintained small libraries. By 1882, Fargo had two library associations, and in 1893 the Masonic Library was established there.

The public-library movement, however, came to North Dakota with the expansive, optimistic days of the second boom (1898-1915). Grafton, inspired by Almon L. Woods, county superintendent of schools and co-publisher of the *Walsh County Record*, established the first public library in North Dakota in 1897 when the town took over the library of a private association and agreed to support it. At Grand Forks the federation of women's clubs promoted a library which opened in 1900 in two rented rooms. That same year, both Fargo and Valley City voted for one-mill tax levies to support libraries. Other towns followed, and by the end of the First World War every large town in the state had a public library.

Philanthropy provided an effective stimulus to the founding of such libraries. In 1898, Andrew Carnegie, the steel multimillionaire of Pittsburgh, announced that he would donate a library building to any town which would agree to support a public library. As the boom expanded in North Dakota, many towns made applications to Carnegie. He gave both Fargo and Grand Forks library buildings costing \$20,000 in 1901, and in the years which followed he gave smaller libraries to Valley City, Grafton, Dickinson, Devils Lake, and Minot. His last gift in North Dakota was a \$25,000 building in Bismarck in 1916. By that time he had given over \$190,000 for eleven library buildings in North Dakota: eight to towns for public libraries and three to colleges (the University of North Dakota, the Agricultural College, and Fargo College). Carnegie donated twenty-five library buildings to South Dakota, fifty-five to Minnesota, and seventeen to Montana, but in those states the gifts were usually smaller.

Other financial contributions also aided the founding of public libraries, generally on the same terms as the Carnegie grants. The Grandin brothers, wealthy bonanza farmers, gave Mayville \$8,000 for a library building in 1899. Alfred E. Dickey donated \$20,000 for a library at Jamestown in 1918, and D. Willis James gave Williston the same amount. In 1919, Orrin A. Leach contributed \$25,000 toward a library building in Wahpeton.

By 1920 all of the larger towns had public libraries. The provision of library service in rural areas, however, was much more difficult. In such cases library associations frequently made collections of books and opened reading rooms. Fifty-eight small libraries of that sort were in existence by 1920. Some had financial support from towns, usually less than five hundred dollars, and sometimes free quarters and heat. Such libraries, often short lived, with their small collections and circulation, gave only a poor reading fare to the rural population. Towns with less than twenty-five hundred people lacked the population and tax base to

support and adequate public library.

One solution was a centralized library to serve the rural population of the whole state. In 1907 the leaders of the North Dakota Library Association persuaded the legislature to establish the Public Library Commission (renamed the State Library Commission in 1920). Since 1897 the superintendent of public instruction, Walter L. Stockwell, had been sending out traveling collections of forty to sixty volumes to each county superintendent for use in the rural schools. He now turned the three thousand volumes of his office's educational reference library and also the traveling libraries over to the Public Library Commission. The commission organized a legislative reference bureau, aided the town libraries, and set up a system of traveling libraries, sending out sixty-volume wooden cases of books. These would be kept in some central place—a school, a home, a store, a post office, or a bank—for a period of six months.

The demand for books was highest in the winter months, when farmers had time to read. The Public Library Commission supplied many people with free reading matter, but appropriations for its work were modest and the demands upon it were more than it could meet. The introduction of parcel post in 1912 was a great boom to books by mail. By 1918 the Public Library Commission had 324 traveling libraries in circulation. In 1922, however, the libraries of towns with more than twenty-five hundred people had 80 percent of the library circulation in the state, although such places had only 14 percent of the population. What North Dakota needed was a system of public libraries supported by larger governmental units than towns. A county-library bill was introduced in the legislature in 1921, but it failed to pass.¹⁴

¹⁴Glenn L. Brudvig, "[Public Libraries in North Dakota: The Formative Years, 1880-1920](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1962), pp. 3-119.