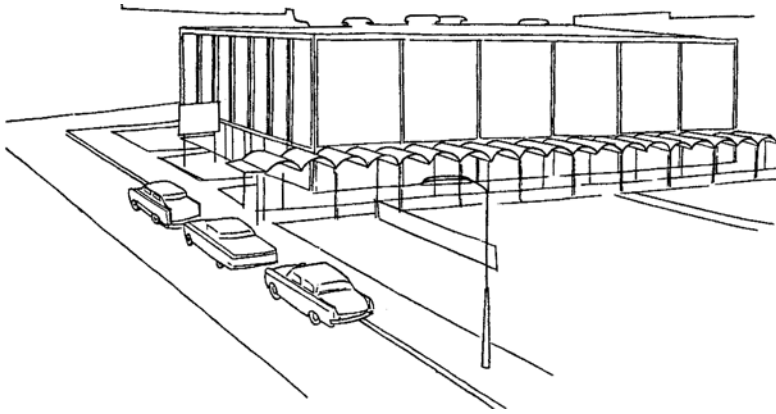


CHAPTER 22



Cultural Growth and Adaptation: The Arts, Libraries, Newspapers, and Churches, 1920-1960

IN THE YEARS AFTER the First World War, both North Dakota and the nation witnessed the same cultural trends: the growth of high school and college enrollments, the decline of rural churches and the union of larger church bodies, increased use of libraries, the expansion of daily newspapers, the rapid acceptance of radio and, later, television, and a growing interest in the arts. In North Dakota, as in the nation, the larger urban places were the centers for cultural activities, and women and women's clubs played a leading role in promoting many of them.

While national trends were important, the cultural life of North Dakota was primarily shaped by the state's rural character. Outside a dozen urban centers, the population was spread very thinly over a large area. Churches, newspapers, and libraries faced the problem of serving small numbers of widely separated people. To meet these needs, the pioneers had established many country churches, many weekly newspapers, and many library associations, so that by 1920, North Dakota had an oversupply of these and other cultural agencies. Many were too small and weak to survive or do effective work. What was needed was to tie the cultural life of the larger towns more thoroughly and intimately to the rural areas, to create in some way the large communities which automobiles and improved roads made possible. In other words, the state's cultural life had to be adapted to existing environmental conditions.

Adaptation, however, was slow and difficult. During the 1920's and 1930's, hard times, many bank failures and farm foreclosures, and the pressing problems of relief for the unemployed and the drought stricken farmers brought about conditions and attitudes which prevented much adaptation, except the simple and inescapable measure of reducing the excessive supply of cultural agencies. Thus the number of churches declined from 2,500 in 1916 to 2,147 in 1936, the number of weekly newspapers from 347 in 1915 to 177 in 1936.

Much more progress was made in the prosperous, optimistic years following the Second World War, when cultural adaptation was aided by the building of thousands of miles of hard-surfaced roads. In the 1950's, civic leaders began to organize county and intercounty libraries and to send out "bookmobiles" to serve widely scattered readers. As country churches closed, those in town came to have many rural members. More and more the music and art departments of the colleges and universities became centers for those interested in such activities. The surviving newspapers increased in distribution in their respective areas, and the *Fargo Forum* and the *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* built up circulation over the whole state. Cultural adaptation, a notable achievement, was bringing about a more satisfying life.

THE ARTS

Aside from the various efforts of the native tribes, the arts have had a long history in North Dakota. George Catlin, a famous early painter of the American Indian, visited the country along the Missouri River and sketched or painted numerous scenes at Fort Union in 1832; a collection of his paintings is now in the National Museum at Washington, D.C. Maximilian's artist-companion, the Swiss Karl Bodmer, executed a large number of drawings and paintings of the Indians and the scenery of the Missouri in 1833-1834. The Bodmer album, published with Maximilian's journal in 1839-1841, is an artistic treasure. In 1962, the Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha purchased the Maximilian-Bodmer collection of early American paintings and documents, including Maximilian's American diaries and 427 original water colors and drawings by Bodmer. In 1843, John James Audubon, the ornithologist, spent a busy summer at Fort Union painting wildlife. Rudolph Friederich Kurz, a Swiss, made sketches at Missouri River fur posts in 1851. And General Philippe Régis de Trobriand amused himself by making sketches at Fort Stevenson in the late 1860's.

In the pioneering stage of white settlement, some North Dakotans began to pay attention to the arts. Budding towns put up buildings with some architectural pretensions, especially public buildings, such as the capitol at Bismarck, in the 1880's. One of the territory's first artists was John D. Allen,

a New Yorker who settled in Mandan in 1881. He opened a taxidermy shop, mounted hunting trophies for Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Mores, and later turned to painting. He knew Sitting Bull, Rain-in-the-Face, and other Sioux, and his canvases of wildlife, Indians, encampments, and the buffalo hunt pictured the Slope country better than the work of any other artist. Indeed, they were to become collectors' items throughout the nation.

Another early artist was Frank B. Fiske. Born at old Fort Bennett in southern Dakota in 1883, he grew up along the Missouri and spent most of his life at Fort Yates. In time, he became a photographer, painter, writer, newspaperman, and raconteur. His immense collection of 3,600 Indian photographs, showing life at Standing Rock Reservation up to 1950, was eventually acquired by the State Historical Society. It is probably the finest in the Northwest.

After 1900 some of the boys and girls growing up on homesteads and in the small towns of North Dakota became interested in sculpture, drawing, and painting. Often they were the sons and daughters of Icelandic and Norwegian immigrants. Some of the notable ones were Paul Fjelde, Kristinn P. Armann, Clell G. Gannon, Blanche Lillebridge, Elmer Halvorson, Laura Taylor, Levon West, James A. Kirkpatrick, Jon Magnus Jonson, and Ida Prokop. Paul Fjelde was the son of a sculptor who had died when Paul was four. His mother, a musician, always had sculptor's clay at hand for the boy in their farm home near Wing in Burleigh County.

Most of the young people, however, received their first art instruction in the state colleges. There they often had well-trained teachers fired with a missionary spirit. One of these was Mary Goodrich Deem, Paul Fjelde's first teacher, who taught art at Valley City Normal for twenty-eight years. In 1910, Margaret K. Cable, trained at the New York State College of Ceramics of Alfred University and also in the potteries of East Liverpool, Ohio, began a teaching career of thirty-nine years at the University of North Dakota. In 1916, Jean M. Hay, a Kansan who had studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris and also in Italy, began a teaching career of eighteen years at Mayville Normal. In 1919, Erwin O. Christensen, a Missourian who had earned advanced degrees in architecture and the fine arts at Harvard, joined the faculty at the University of North Dakota. He later became curator of the Index of American Design and Decorative Arts at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. In 1927, Eva Valker Hartnett, a native of Wahpeton who had studied at the University of Minnesota, began to teach art at Minot State Teachers College. In 1928, Paul E. Barr, an Indianan who had studied at the Sorbonne, came to the University of North Dakota. In 1931, Zoe Beiler, an Ohioan trained at the Art Institute of Chicago, began to teach at Dickinson State Teachers College. In 1934, Ann Brown Bolin, who was

trained at Columbia University and who studied under such famous artists as Grant Wood, came to the Agricultural College.

Teachers like these, however, did not have a hand in the art education of all North Dakotans who were to become professional artists. Some of the latter, such as Ida Prokop, Einar H. Olstad, and Levon West, were largely self-taught. But the teachers did arouse much interest in art, and they sometimes sent their students on to larger centers of learning. North Dakotans went to the Minneapolis Art Institute, to New York City, and even abroad, but most frequently they studied in Chicago. Jon Magnus Jonson and Paul Fjelde, for example, studied at the Lorado Taft Studio there; Fjelde went on to New York, Paris, and Copenhagen.

In North Dakota, as in the nation, interest in art grew in the years after the First World War. Pioneering, with its primary preoccupation of earning a living, was over; the towns were growing; the institutions of higher education were increasing in size and influence. In the 1930's, Works Progress Administration art projects gave painters more opportunities. After the Second World War, amateur painting became a popular hobby. Perhaps thousands of North Dakotans, stimulated by the nation-wide vogue and such teachers as Paul Barr, found art an interesting diversion.

Besides the amateurs, a considerable number of people reached professional status. When Barr wrote *North Dakota Artists* (published posthumously in 1954), he included sketches of forty-seven persons. They frequently chose the prairie, the Badlands, Indians, and the buffalo as subjects; they carved wood and stone, painted with oils and water colors, shaped wrought iron and clay. They exhibited their work in local and national shows and even abroad. Bismarck, through the enthusiasm of Marion J. Piper in conducting American Art Week exhibitions in 1945-1947, became the center of interest in the state. All North Dakota artists created something of beauty, and some received considerable recognition. A dozen won places on the honor roll of the American Artists Professional League.

The best—Paul Fjelde, Jon Magnus Jonson, Emile Walters, and Levon West—had national careers and reputations. Fjelde carved panels depicting industrial life for the Federal Street Building in Boston. Jonson's sculpture adorned Music Hall on the campus of Purdue University. Walters' paintings of the mountains of Iceland earned him the Knight's Cross of the Order of the Falcon from the Icelandic government. West's etching of Charles A. Lindbergh in 1927 won that artist national fame while he was still in his twenties. Then, under the name Ivan Dmitri, he became a master of color photography, making a series of more than 180 Americana color pictures for the *Saturday Evening Post*.

But many artists who worked in the state, though not so well known, also made contributions to North Dakota culture. In 1940, Paul Barr's *Ranch and Rider* and Zoe Beiler's *Cowboy* were chosen to represent North Dakota in the International Business Machines All-State Exhibition in New York City. In 1946, Ann Brown Bolin's sculptured *Bison* was purchased by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. In 1951, Margaret K. Cable won a medal for outstanding achievement in ceramic art from Alfred University. Clell G. Gannon, a poet (*Songs of the Bunch Grass Acres*) as well as a painter, did backgrounds for habitat groups in the State Historical Society's museum, murals in Burleigh County Courthouse, and covers for the Oscar H. Will and Company seed catalogs. Gannon, a perceptive, thoughtful person in precarious health, became one of the best interpreters of the Great Plains.

Blanche Lillebridge Harding of Dickinson worked in ceramics, painted, and, with her husband, created a troupe of marionettes. Laura Taylor Hughes and her husband organized a pottery company to turn out Rosemeade ware at Wahpeton. James A. Kirkpatrick, himself a son of homesteaders near Sentinel Butte, painted homesteaders, ranch scenes, and buffalo hunts. Chicago-trained Louise Minert Kelly, a housewife at Carrington, won a prize at a Washington, D.C., exhibition with one painting and had another, executed during a trip to southern France, hung in a Paris salon. Beauty-loving Ida Prokop Lee, working in her Prairie Studio near Valley City, sculptured a series of portrait busts of men and women of the five Indian tribes in North Dakota. Versatile Julia E. Mattson, both a painter and a talented potter on the faculty of the University of North Dakota, exhibited tile plaques of North Dakota scenes at the Chicago Century of Progress.

Norway-born Einar Hanson Olstad, painter and sculptor, fashioned three wrought-iron cowboys for the gateway to Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park. Ole A. Olson of Valley City and Thelma Rudser of McKenzie carved beautiful pieces in wood. Ralph Waldo Smith was a homesteader and then for thirty-two years an agronomist at the Dickinson Branch Experiment Station. The father of a wheat experimenter at the Agricultural College, he got his first art training in his sixties and produced a series of paintings on the progress of farm machinery for the State Historical Society. In 1933-1934, Isabel P. Snelgrove, water colorist at the university, exhibited one hundred abstract designs at the Chicago Century of Progress.

Icelander Thorarin Snowfield and Syrian Henry J. Tanous painted the American scene for a Works Progress Administration project, producing such canvases as *County Fair*, *Threshing Crew at Noon*, and *Jack Rabbit Round-Up*. Tall, gentle Ernest V. Wenner, a teacher of engineering drawing at the university as well as a commercial artist, sculptor, and diorama

builder, made a mural map for the foyer of the Charles R. Robertson Lignite Laboratory at Grand Forks. At the university, Robert A. Nelson painted a huge mural of the state's development for the Chester Fritz Library, and Stanley O. Johnson created a wrought iron sphere symbolizing the wide influence of the university to memorialize Old Main.

North Dakota artists, creating things of beauty and interpreting the life and moods of the plains and prairie country, not only developed their own talents but also enriched the cultural life of the rural, sparsely settled state, adding another dimension to its variety.

THE EXTENSION OF LIBRARY SERVICE

Reading is a universal cultural activity, and so the easy availability of books is of primary importance for a satisfying cultural life. To have books means that a society must provide libraries. North Dakota had Carnegie libraries in most of its larger towns before the First World War, generally through the efforts of clubwomen, and the state legislature had set up the Public Library Commission in 1907 (renamed the State Library Commission in 1920) to meet the needs of the rural areas.

Yet library service was inadequate in the years after the First World War. The enemies of the Nonpartisan League charged the State Library Commission with the dissemination of socialist literature, a part of North Dakota's "red scare," and nearly put it out of business with their investigations. The seventeen public libraries in the state in 1922 were quite small. Fargo had the largest, with some seventeen thousand books, and Grand Forks was second with nine thousand. Few librarians in the state had any formal training. In addition to the public libraries, there were some forty libraries organized by associations without any tax support.¹

The 1920's witnessed a remarkable growth. About 1923 or 1924, Miss Lillian E. Cook became the director of the State Library Commission. A knowledgeable librarian with great energy and devotion, she extended the reach of the commission, increasing the circulation of its traveling libraries, each a case of twenty-five books, to schools and communities. By 1930, thirty libraries were receiving public money.

In the 1930's, although the depression cut library budgets, people had time for reading, and circulation continued to climb, reaching an all-time high in 1939-1940. Works Progress Administration projects helped in several ways. They gave the State Library Commission 2,800 books, employed women for work in the libraries, remodeled the Fargo library, and added a wing to the Dickinson library. In Grand Forks the labor administration, elected in

¹North Dakota State Library Commission, *Biennial Reports, 1918-1920 and 1920-1922*, pp. 9, 11, 15. These reports are the principal source on libraries.

1934, increased that city's library budget.

In an effort to meet the needs of small villages and rural areas, a number of associations organized libraries which gave free service and later received tax money. By 1940 there were thirty-seven, but most of them had only small collections of books and were open only a few hours a week. There were, in addition, twenty-five associations which charged nominal fees, but these were commonly given a room by the municipal government. At Cavalier, for example, the library was housed in the fire hall, the Masonic Temple, the old jail, and the Presbyterian Church before it put up its own building in 1956. Most of the association libraries were quite small, but the Langdon association had 6,600 books and the Watford City association some 5,000. By 1940 the State Library Commission, still being run by Lillian E. Cook, had 15,000 books in its 414 traveling libraries.

The Second World War saw a general decline in the number of libraries and in reading. By 1946 the State Library Commission had only 367 traveling libraries, and in the 1946-1948 biennium it added only 65 books to these units. Grand Forks was an example of both the poor condition of even the larger public libraries and the low level of reading. In 1945-1946 the people of Grand Forks were drawing only about two books per capita per year, or about 23 percent of the standard circulation of nine books per capita for a city of its size. The Grand Forks Public Library had only 21,000 books, or about one book per person for the population. This was only half the minimum established by the American Library Association.

A more serious problem, however, was that of making books available to the people of the sparsely settled prairie, where most North Dakotans lived. The State Library Commission and the public and association libraries simply could not give either the people of the countryside or village residents access to the variety of books which would enrich their lives by widening their intellectual horizons. In the early 1920's a committee had spent much time preparing a county-library bill, which was introduced in the 1923 legislature. That year, however, was a time of severe deflation, with bank failures reaching an all-time high. No county was ready to undertake a public-library program, and the idea was dropped. In the late 1930's the Works Progress Administration made an abortive effort to start a bookmobile program for rural areas.

With the return of optimism after the war, there was again talk of county libraries. Norwegian-dominated Divide County in the dry, sparsely settled northwestern corner of the state, where the population was only 4.6 persons per square mile, established a library in 1947, the first county library in the state. Stutsman County, largely German and German Russian, with 10.6 persons per square mile, established the second in 1954. By 1957-1958 the

library in Stutsman County was spending \$4,271 annually on books and periodicals, more than any of the state's other libraries except those in the largest towns. It was also operating the first bookmobile in North Dakota.

The county libraries met a real need, for most rural areas did not have adequate library service. In the mid-1950's, Hazel Webster Byrnes, the dynamic, idealistic director of the State Library Commission who had taken Lillian E. Cook's place about 1948, wrote that the commission "does not and never would be able to give adequate service to the entire rural areas of the state." In 1953 only 27 percent of the population of North Dakota, the percentage living in urban areas, had adequate public-library service; another 11 percent had public libraries, but these were far from adequate; and 62 percent had no library service at all except that from the State Library Commission in Bismarck.

Many people were concerned. "Citizens for the Library," a movement started at Edgeley in 1950 by crusading Mrs. Emil G. Bloedow, worked to unite all sorts of community organizations to build up support for public libraries. In Williston, Judge Eugene A. Burdick, son of Congressman Usher L. Burdick, took the lead in reviving the James Memorial Library, winning a citation for his efforts from the American Library Association in 1956. With the advent of bigger budgets, new books, and a renewed enthusiasm for reading, library circulations increased rapidly. At Bismarck, the most reading town, and also at Grand Forks, circulation increased fourfold from 1945-1946 to 1959-1960. By 1960 the public library circulation in Bismarck was about fourteen books per person per year, in Grand Forks about seven, and in Fargo about five.

The big advance in rural library service, however, came only after passage of the Library Services Act of 1956. It provided federal funds, to be matched by state funds, for promoting the development of library services in rural areas. The law was a boon to North Dakota, for, among the states, it had the largest percentage of population without local library service. In 1957 the state legislature appropriated matching funds and authorized any county or combination of counties, after a petition had been signed by 51 percent of the voters, to establish library services and to levy up to two mills for their support.

Progress came quickly. By 1960, state-federal money (\$43,304 state, \$156,370 federal) had helped to establish five county and regional libraries in the western part of the state. The North Dakota Federation of Women's Clubs also helped by giving \$5,000 for a demonstration bookmobile. Williams, Mountrail, and McKenzie counties established the West Plains Library at Williston and bought two bookmobiles. McLean and Mercer counties organized a library at Riverdale and bought a bookmobile.

LaMoure and Logan counties set up a library at Edgeley, and Ward and Morton were moving toward the establishment of county libraries.

WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

By furnishing the bulk of all reading matter, newspapers played a leading role in the intellectual life of North Dakotans. They were, however, affected by the same problem which influenced all other aspects of North Dakota life: sparsity of population. As in the case of other institutions, the few large, influential newspapers were found in the large centers of population, the many small and less influential ones in the scattered towns and villages. Where they served too small an area, that is, where they were too close together, they could not prosper, and yet the process of settlement had naturally brought about the establishment of a considerable number of weekly papers. By 1915 there were 347 weeklies in North Dakota, and some very small places had two papers. With the completion of settlement, the number began to decrease, so that by 1919 it was down to 293, almost half of which, 145 papers, were published in towns of less than 500 people. The steady decline, especially strong in the 1920's, continued into the 1950's. By 1960 there were only 101 weeklies and 3 semiweeklies. Only 18 of them were published in towns of less than 500, and no town had two weekly papers.

As the smaller papers disappeared, the circulations of the survivors grew. By 1960 some 45 of the weeklies and semiweeklies had circulations over 1,400 and were prosperous businesses. They commonly took in a third of their gross income from job printing. About 25 papers, however, were struggling along with circulations under 500. The smaller weeklies were often the ones too close together or too close to a city with a daily paper. The larger weeklies, better adapted to the sparsely settled prairie, had large circulation areas with little competition. In 1961 the largest ones were the *Langdon Republican* with a circulation of 3,210, the *Bottineau Courant* with 3,478, and the *Williston Plains Reporter* with 3,721. The three semiweeklies all had large circulations: the *Walsh County Record* (Grafton), 4,563; the *Richland County Farmer-Globe* (Wahpeton), 6,426; and the *Bismarck Capital*, 11,988.

The weeklies were important. In the early years, when only a small part of the population saw a daily paper, they reported both national and international news. They were plain papers (advertising on the front page, few illustrations), and their editors were plain spoken. Seeking to clean up Minot, George W. Wilson wrote in the *Reporter*: "The selling of liquor and the bawdy house go hand in hand." The weeklies were generally owned by their editors, seasoned newspapermen who took a real interest in the development of their communities and the state. By the 1940's and 1950's,

many were prosperous businessmen and conservative Republicans, though a few papers, like the *Renville County Farmer* (Mohall), had Democratic leanings. Some editors took an active part in public life; Ralph Beede (*Grant County News*), Rilie Morgan (*Walsh County Record*), and Harry O'Brien (*Walsh County Press*) were repeatedly re-elected to the state legislature. Henry P. Sullivan (*Renville County Farmer*) and John Conrad (*Bismarck Capital* and *Morton County News*) were appointed to the Board of Higher Education by Governor William Guy.

Back in 1886 the newspaper publishers had organized the North Dakota Press Association to promote their mutual interests. One of its leaders in the 1920's and 1930's was Mark I. Forkner, editor of the *Langdon Republican*. The association secured the establishment of a practical printing course at the Wahpeton School of Science in 1922, worked closely with the Department of Journalism (started in 1921) at the University of North Dakota, and set up an advertising agency in 1936 to help weeklies get national advertising. In 1958 it placed its headquarters at the university, where its manager, Paul C. Schmidt, also taught courses in journalism.²

DAILY NEWSPAPERS

After 1919 the weekly papers declined relatively as the dailies expanded. In 1919 the weeklies had an estimated circulation of more than 200,000, as compared to about 60,000 for the dailies, less than 50,000 of it within the state.³ Thus nearly two-thirds of the people in North Dakota did not see a daily paper. The circulation of the dailies grew substantially in the 1920's, modestly in the 1930's, and then rapidly in the 1940's and 1950's. By 1961, North Dakota dailies had a circulation of nearly 164,000, about 136,000 of it within the state.

In addition, the circulation of the *Minneapolis Tribune* in North Dakota had increased. In 1941 the *Tribune* sold some 2,600 copies of its daily edition and some 17,000 Sunday editions in the state; in 1961 the figures were 9,500 for the daily and 44,000 for the Sunday papers. Moreover, the *Wall Street Journal* had 1,445 subscribers in North Dakota in 1961.

Thus by 1961 the daily circulation within the state was about 147,000 papers, or 85 percent of the 173,000 households. In the United States the daily newspaper circulation was about 109 percent of the number of

²John C. Sim, "[The History of the North Dakota Press Association, 1886-1940](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1940), pp. 7, 221, 161-162, 175-176.

³Such figures can only be estimates. The circulations of the weeklies were mostly not certified, and the Audit Bureau of Circulation breakdowns on circulation are not available for that early date

households. In North Dakota the circulation of weekly papers had fallen to some 150,000 by 1961, or 87 percent of the number of households; in the nation the circulation of weeklies amounted to 40 percent of the number of households. Large numbers of the North Dakota weeklies went to former residents living outside the state. Because North Dakotans lived in a rural state with a sparse population, they read fewer daily papers and more weeklies than did Americans generally.

Although the circulation of the dailies and the weeklies was roughly the same, the dailies, larger papers issued from five to seven times a week, had become much more important. The growth of daily circulation, nearly 200 percent from 1920 to 1960 while the population of the state actually declined, brought about a silent revolution in North Dakota. The daily papers, growing ever more influential, tended to break down the remoteness and isolation of life on the sparsely settled prairie, to bring urban ways and attitudes to a rural people, and to exert a pervasive conservative influence upon the thinking of a population with a long tradition of radicalism.

Among the dailies, the most influential were the five leading papers: the *Fargo Forum* (1961 circulation 54,664), the *Grand Forks Herald* (34,751), the *Minot Daily News* (27,563), the *Bismarck Tribune* (14,400), and the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (North Dakota circulation 9,445). By 1961 they had 79 percent of the daily circulation within the state; the six other dailies in North Dakota (the *Devils Lake Daily Journal*, the *Dickinson Press*, the *Jamestown Sun*, the *Mandan Pioneer*, the *Valley City Times-Record*, and the *Williston Herald*) had together only 20 percent of the circulation, and the *Wall Street Journal* had about 1 percent. The *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, though published some two hundred miles outside North Dakota, gave excellent coverage of developments in the state; it had a circulation in every county (over a thousand copies in Burleigh County alone, or nearly twice as many as the *Fargo Forum*), and was the fifth leading daily in North Dakota. Moreover, in 1961 the *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* had the largest circulation of any Sunday paper in North Dakota: 43,773 to 41,246 for the *Fargo Forum* and 26,272 for the *Grand Forks Herald*, the only Sunday papers published in the state. But the *Forum* sold 13,035 Sunday papers in Minnesota and the *Herald* sold 7,855 in that state.

Probably the most notable thing about the larger dailies in North Dakota was the vast areas over which they circulated. Each served a retail trading zone equal to a fourth or a fifth of the state (fifteen to twenty thousand square miles); the zones for the *Herald* and the *Forum* reached far into Minnesota. But each pushed out beyond the retail trading zone of its city and competed with dailies published in the smaller trading centers, thereby restricting the circulations of the latter. The bigger the paper, the farther it reached beyond

its own retail trading zone. Thus in 1961 the *Bismarck Tribune* sold an average of 1,675 papers outside its retail trading zone, the *Minot Daily News* sold 3,077, the *Grand Forks Herald* 4,308, and the *Fargo Forum* an astonishing 13,596. The *Forum* was the newspaper for the whole state. It sold many papers, not only in the counties where smaller dailies were published, but even in counties where there were other large dailies. Each morning, some 21,000 copies of the *Forum* were mailed to subscribers, and on Sundays trucks carried the paper to more than 194 towns.

Because the big dailies were distributed over such wide areas, they had much larger circulations than were usual for papers in cities of the same size in other parts of the nation. In Iowa, for example, the *Ames Tribune*, published in a city about the size of Bismarck, had a circulation less than half that of the *Bismarck Tribune*. One consequence of serving a large territory was that distribution costs were some three times greater than they were in a state such as Iowa, another instance of the cost of distance in a sparsely settled country.

THE CHARACTER OF THE LARGER DAILIES

The *Forum*, *Herald*, *Daily News*, and *Tribune* became large, stable, prosperous, and well-managed business enterprises partly because of the disappearance of competitors. In 1910 the state had a dozen daily papers—two each in Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Minot, and Valley City, and one each in Bismarck and Devils Lake. Some soon died, but in 1919, Fargo, Grand Forks, and Devils Lake each had two dailies. Within a few years, however, each city had only one. Later, two papers became dailies in the western end of the state: the *Williston Herald* in 1930 and the *Dickinson Press* in 1942.

As the dailies grew, they changed in many ways. They quite naturally became more conservative. They constructed large facilities: the *Forum* put up a five-story building. They installed the most modern high-speed presses: the *Daily News*'s Goss press weighed 130 tons, could print 35,000 papers an hour, and consumed over 1,000 tons of newsprint a year. The dailies bought teletype setting equipment, which set type by running perforated tape through the Linotypes. They put out larger papers: the *Daily News* grew from an average of 9 pages in 1943 to an average of 21 in 1961. They employed large staffs: the *Bismarck Tribune*, the smallest, had nearly 100 employees by the 1950's. They had round-the-clock wire service from the Associated Press, and some of them also from United Press International: by 1953 the *Forum* was spending \$3,000 a month on wire-service news. They carried syndicated features by the leading writers of the nation: the *Herald* had Walter Lippmann, Drew Pearson, Joseph Alsop, Dr. Walter C. Alvarez, Ann Landers, David Lawrence, Sylvia Porter, George E. Sokolsky,

and Westbrook Pegler among the dozen or so syndicated columnists it published. Two newspapers, the *Forum* and the *Herald*, owned radio stations for a time.

Moreover, the papers played an important role in their cities. "They are the herald, the band, and the big drum that make the noise for a city and keep it before the rest of the country," wrote Roy P. Johnson, veteran reporter on the *Forum*. "They shout and exult over its accomplishments, howl down the critics, and often growl at those citizens who hurt the city. They put the city's best foot forward."⁴

Each of the four big dailies had some special distinction. The *Herald* had the most syndicated features. The *Tribune* won a Pulitzer prize for "the most disinterested and meritorious public service rendered by an American newspaper" in 1937—a series of articles and editorials entitled "Self-Help in the Dust Bowl." It was the smallest newspaper ever to receive that honor. By the late 1950's the *Daily News* was generally thought to be doing the best job of covering the legislature.

But the *Forum* had the best coverage of state news and the greatest editorial influence. Twice it won awards as the best newspaper published in a city under 50,000; for its coverage of Fargo's tornado in June, 1957, it won a Pulitzer prize for local reporting to meet a deadline.

Each paper's success was the work of capable men. For nearly fifty years, George D. Mann and, after his death in 1936, his widow, Stella Hilleboe Mann, the daughter of Traill County pioneers, controlled the *Bismarck Tribune*. Mann, born in Ontario and a graduate of the University of Minnesota, had worked on St. Paul papers before coming to Bismarck as editor of the *Tribune* in 1914. He purchased the paper from the Marshall H. Jewell estate in 1917 and in 1930 made Kenneth W. Simons the editor. Then thirty-two, Simons was an able Ohioan who had come to Bismarck in 1923 as a correspondent for the Associated Press. He not only brought a Pulitzer prize to the paper but also became active in civic affairs, a leading advocate of irrigation, and the friend of many public officials. One of the inner circle of the John Moses Administration, he masterminded the campaign which elected Moses to the Senate over Gerald P. Nye in 1944.⁵ When Simons died in 1948, Mrs. Mann appointed John O. Hjelle editor. Thirty-five and a graduate of Luther College, Hjelle had been Senator Milton R. Young's administrative assistant for three years before he became editor.

THE HERALD AND THE FORUM

Just as ownership by the Manns gave stability to the *Tribune* (it has had

⁴Roy P. Johnson to Elwyn B. Robinson, February 20, 1962.

⁵Obituary in [Grand Forks Herald](#), April 21, 1948.

only three owners since its founding in 1873), so, too, did the tenure of George B. Winship, W. P. Davies, and Melvin M. Opegard give stability to the *Grand Forks Herald*. Davies was born on a farm in Ontario and came to North Dakota in 1882 to work on a railroad surveying crew. Later he farmed, taught school, and worked as a carpenter. Not until he was thirty-four did he begin his long career as a newspaperman, taking a job with the *Grand Forks Northwest News* in 1896 and soon moving to the *Grand Forks Plaindealer*. In 1897 he joined the *Herald*. Serving an informal apprenticeship under George B. Winship, he learned the trade and rose from reporter to editor in chief. Davies was a small, slight man with a short beard, quiet ways, a love for circuses and gardening, and a keen, analytical mind. He became a civic leader, promoted city parks and better schools, and with his daily column "That Reminds Me" won a following of thousands. When he died in 1944 after forty-seven years on the *Herald*, Governor John Moses said: "The state has lost one of its finest citizens, universally admired and loved by all."⁶

In 1911, Winship sold the *Herald* to a group headed by Jerry Bacon, who combined it with the *Grand Forks Evening Times*. In 1917, Bacon's younger brother, Julius F. Bacon, became general manager of the *Herald*; he was president of the company when Melvin M. Opegard bought the paper in 1929. Opegard, a stocky Minnesotan well known in northwestern newspaper circles, was then thirty-eight. He had studied at Macalester College, worked on Twin City papers, and had been with the Associated Press over fifteen years, eight of them in charge of its operations in Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota. He had the financial backing of the Ridder brothers of New York City and of Leo E. Owens, publisher of the *St. Paul Dispatch* and *Pioneer Press*. The Ridders owned a string of newspapers, including the *New York Staats-Zeitung*, the *Aberdeen American-News*, and the *St. Paul Dispatch* and *Pioneer Press* among others.

Opegard, gratifying, as he said, "a life-long ambition to become the publisher of an important newspaper of the Northwest," became president of the *Herald* company as well as the editor and publisher of the paper. He was familiar with the problems of the region and, as he wrote upon taking over, "earnestly desirous of having a real part in their solution." A good boss and a genial storyteller, he won the respect of the community. Opegard soon set W. P. Davies to writing his well-known column, began to add syndicated features, such as O. O. McIntyre's "New York Day by Day," built new quarters for the *Herald*, modernized its equipment, and expanded its circulation.

The most influential newspapermen in the state, however, were those who

⁶Obituary in [*Grand Forks Herald*](#), May 20, 1944.

ran the *Fargo Forum*. Their leader was Norman B. Black. Born of Scottish stock in Ontario and raised, as he liked to say, "with the atmosphere of a print shop in my nostrils," Black had run papers in small Wisconsin towns before coming to Grand Forks in 1906 as business manager of the dying *Press*. The following year, he became manager of the *Grand Forks Evening Times* and put it on its feet. After the *Times* was consolidated with the *Herald* in 1911, Black managed the *Herald*, at that time the largest paper in the state. With him on the *Herald* were his son, Norman D. Black, who worked on the production end, and Holger D. Paulson, who became city editor of the paper at the age of twenty-four. Paulson had begun as a youngster with the *Grand Forks Plaindealer* at four dollars a week.

Restless for larger opportunities, the elder Black had long talked of buying a paper in Fargo. In 1916-17 the three men left the *Herald*. Early in 1916 Paulson became city editor of the *Forum*. About a year later the elder Black bought the paper; after some months the younger Black joined the enterprise as circulation manager. Norman B. Black was publisher and majority stockholder; Paulson was the editor.⁷

In 1920 they expanded their operations. Joining with Hal S. Davies, the advertising manager of the *Forum*, they bought the *Minot Daily News*. Davies moved to Minot as the publisher. Then thirty-four, he had already worked for many years on papers in Crookston, Devils Lake, St. Paul, and Fargo. During his first ten years in Minot, he raised the circulation of the paper from less than two thousand to more than nine thousand. A short, friendly, enterprising man, he was soon taking a leading part in civic affairs. In 1938 the Fargo men sold their *News* stock to Davies, and Raymond C. Dobson became a stockholder. Dobson had joined the paper in 1921 when he was only nineteen, working at first as city editor and reporter. In 1955 he became the publisher, while Davies continued as president of the company. In the 1950's the circulation of the *Daily News* grew much more rapidly than that of the other dailies, increasing almost 50 percent from 1949 to 1961. Its quality improved markedly, and its influence increased throughout the northwestern part of the state.

After purchasing the *Forum* in 1917, the Blacks and Paulson, a great team, made it the leading paper in the state. The Blacks were unusually capable businessmen. Norman B., the father, was a man of middle stature with blue eyes and pink cheeks. Friendly, he knew all of the *Forum* employees personally and loved to sing at service clubs. He became active in Rotary, the Masons, and welfare organizations (president of the North Dakota Society for Crippled Children, chairman of an advisory committee for the

⁷The best account is in the [Fargo Forum](#), November 17, 1953, which has a special supplement on the history of the paper.

Salvation Army), and was made a director of Northwest Bancorporation, a bank holding company. Devout Presbyterians, he and his wife gave a \$30,000 organ to the Fargo Presbyterian Church. when he died in 1931, Judge John Burke called him “a power for good through the medium of his daily paper.”⁸ His son, tall, big-boned Norman D. Black, became the publisher of the *Forum*. Forty-four and with a quarter of a century of newspaper experience, he met the challenge of the hard depression years. Upon his death in 1944, his son, Norman D. Black, Jr., thirty-one, became the publisher. A quick-witted graduate of Northwestern University, short, spare, ambitious, friendly, he continued the family tradition of civic concern.

The business capacity of the three Blacks was matched by the journalistic genius of Holger D. (“Happy”) Paulson. Short, stocky, brainy, a born newspaperman, full of bustling energy, he was only thirty when he became editor of the *Forum*. Still, he had fifteen years of newspaper experience behind him and had begun to report the state legislature as early as 1909. With his ever present cigar and his unblinking stare, he was a demanding, curt, brusque taskmaster on the job, intent on getting accurate and thorough coverage of the news. Although he sometimes looked to his employees like Charles Laughton playing Captain Bligh in *Mutiny on the Bounty*, he was actually a generous, impulsive, warmhearted person. J. Fred Essary of the *Baltimore Sun*, on an assignment in North Dakota, decided that Paulson was one of the great reporters of the age, and P. W. Lanier, Sr., a Democratic leader in the state, rated the *Forum* high: “Fargo has a better newspaper than most cities four or five times its size.” Without question, Paulson and the *Forum* had become a real force in North Dakota politics. After fifty-five years in journalism, Paulson retired in 1957, and his son John became editor of the paper.

Through the years the Blacks and the Paulsons met with much success. When they took over in 1917, the *Forum*’s circulation was only a little more than two-thirds that of the *Grand Forks Herald*. But the *Forum* overtook the *Herald*, until then generally the state’s leading paper, in the early 1920’s, and by 1929 it had nearly trebled its 1917 circulation. The *Forum* held its own in the 1930’s and then grew rapidly after the Second World War, reaching a circulation of about 55,000 by 1961. In 1917 it had one-sixth of the daily circulation of the various newspapers published in North Dakota; by the 1950’s it had one-third.

The reading-matter supplied by the *Forum* and other newspapers was generously supplemented, not only by national magazines, but also by many periodicals published within the state. After 1919 there were from ten to

⁸Obituary in [*Grand Forks Herald*](#), January 9, 1931.

twenty such periodicals. Almost all of them were put out by organizations—churches, women’s clubs, the North Dakota Stockmen’s Association, and similar groups. In 1961, for example, the North Dakota Education Association published the *North Dakota Teacher* (circulation 8,231), the Greater North Dakota Association the *North Dakotan* (6,024), the Diocese of Fargo *Catholic Action News* (20,400), the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives *North Dakota Rural Electric* (41,582), the North Dakota State Game and Fish Department *North Dakota Outdoors* (20,000), and the North Dakota Farmers’ Union the *North Dakota Union Farmer* (about 43,000). The last, a well edited semimonthly, was probably one of the most influential publications in the state.

RADIO AND TELEVISION

The work of the newspapers was supplemented by radio and television. These new means of communication came quickly to North Dakota. Earl C. Reineke, an inventive young Fargoan fascinated by wireless and electricity, became the state’s pioneer in radio. He built his first transmitter in his bedroom when he was thirteen years old. When KDKA (Pittsburgh) inaugurated commercial broadcasting in the United States in 1920, Reineke, then twenty-seven, and some Fargo associates began to manufacture radio receivers. To increase sales, Reineke secured a license for WDAY and began to broadcast with a fifty-watt transmitter from the cupola of Cass County Courthouse on May 22, 1922. There were then fewer than fifty radio stations in the nation and none in the Twin Cities.

Others, however, were soon established, and by 1930, North Dakota had six stations. The important ones were WDAY and KFYZ (Bismarck), both of which operated with 1,000-watt transmitters. The other four (KDLR at Devils Lake, KGCU at Mandan, KLPM at Minot, and KFJM at Grand Forks) were permitted only 100 watts. At WDAY, Reineke encouraged many amateur entertainers who were clamoring to donate their talent to radio. The early stations brought not only news and entertainment to their audiences but also weather reports, saving many lives by issuing storm warnings. When blizzards stopped all other communication, they would stay on the air day and night, giving business and personal messages of all sorts.

Reineke and other broadcasters, such as Frank E. Fitzsimonds of KFYZ, sought to expand the range of their stations over the sparsely settled prairie, a vital necessity if they were to reach many people and increase their advertising revenues. WDAY was a leader. It steadily increased its power—to 1,000 watts in 1928, when it moved the transmitter to West Fargo. In 1929 the Sioux made Reineke a chief, naming him “Chief Voice in the Sky.” In 1931 the station affiliated with the National Broadcasting Company; its studio occupied the top floor of Fargo’s new skyscraper, the eight-story

Black Building. The next year, WDAY had three 265-foot towers. In 1935 its power was increased to 5,000 watts and it became associated with the *Fargo Forum*.

Progress was slower at Grand Forks. In 1923 the University of North Dakota purchased the transmitting equipment of the Electric Construction Company (which was abandoning its short-lived radio venture) for \$750 and began broadcasting a few hours a week as KFJM. In 1930, Dalton LeMasurier, then only twenty, began to manage the station as a commercial operation under an agreement with the university, but the educational broadcasts still used one or two hours in the afternoon. Elmer O. Hanson soon became Grand Forks' chief announcer. In 1936, KFJM constructed a 165-foot tower and increased its power to 1,000 watts for daytime broadcasting and 500 watts at night. In 1941, LeMasurier organized a new station, KILO, which shared the use of the KFJM transmitter until 1956. The *Grand Forks Herald* purchased KILO in the spring of 1947.

An important new leader appeared when John W. Boler moved from Minneapolis in 1939 to buy a struggling little station in Jamestown. Boler changed its call letters to KSJB, secured a low wavelength, joined the Columbia network, and increased the power of the transmitter to 5,000 watts, the maximum allowed a regional station by the Federal Communications Commission. These improvements greatly expanded the range and hence the income of the station. Boler formed the North Dakota Broadcasting Company, acquired KCJB in Minot, and then went into television in the 1950's.

Boler's station KCJB-TV began operations in 1953, inaugurating television in North Dakota, but later that year, WDAY-TV and KFJR-TV also began telecasts. The following year, Boler installed a 1,000-foot tower and antenna sixteen miles northeast of Valley City for a new station, KXJB-TV. It had studios in both Valley City and Fargo and began telecasting over Channel 4 in August, using Columbia network programs. KXJB-TV was one of the largest television stations in the nation with regard to area served a large part of eastern North Dakota. Boler soon had another television station in Bismarck and an affiliate in Dickinson. His network was connected by a privately owned microwave system.

Although Boler's operation was the largest in the state, others also expanded their facilities. In its first years, WDAY-TV was using a transmitter with a 433-foot tower and 66,000 watts of power (located just south of Fargo), and its telecasts were reaching some 100,000 homes. In 1955 it took over three floors of the newly constructed American Life Building. In February, 1959, it began to use a new transmitter with a 1,206-foot tower and antenna and 100,000 watts of power just east of Amenia. The

high tower, built at a cost of \$150,000, allowed its telecasts to reach some 150,000 homes, or an estimated population of 485,000 in an area stretching from east of Detroit Lakes to west of Jamestown, and from north of Grand Forks to the South Dakota line. In 1961 the Forum Publishing Company, acquiring Reineke's stock, became the sole owner of WDAY, Inc., but Reineke continued as chairman of the board of directors.

In November, 1963, the Pembina Broadcasting Company was completing its 2,063-foot tower and antenna near Blanchard for KTHI-TV. The tower, the highest man-made structure in the world, would transmit a powerful signal for more than one hundred miles in all directions.

The high towers and antennas enabled the various stations to reach many people with their broadcasts and telecasts, even though these listeners and viewers were widely scattered over the vast plains and prairie country. By 1962 North Dakota had twenty-three radio and eleven television stations, more television stations in proportion to population than any other state. They put North Dakotans in instant touch with public events, cultural activities, and entertainment throughout the nation and also of much of the world.⁹

CHURCHES

Churches were an important part of North Dakota life, for they served as the chief cultural institutions for adult North Dakotans. After the First World War, secularism, denominational rivalry, shifts in population, and the economic cycle affected churches in both North Dakota and the nation. In North Dakota, however, the churches were also affected by the ethnic origins and rural character of the population.

North Dakota's churches were largely immigrant churches because its population, by the 1920 census, was 67 percent foreign-born or had foreign-born parents. Only Massachusetts and Rhode Island had larger percentages. Moreover, the state's population was 86 percent rural in 1920, living in the country or in villages of less than 2,500. Except for Mississippi, North Dakota was at that time the most rural state in the nation. It had more churches in the countryside and in small villages than did any other state.

All of this meant small congregations, dependence on outside aid, and

⁹ Frank E. Fitzsimonds, "[*Historically Speaking*](#)": [*A Short History of Broadcasting in North Dakota*](#) [Bismarck: Conrad Publishing Company, 1958]; [*Fargo Forum*](#), November 7, 1958; Douglas E. Williams, "[*The History of KFJM*](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1958), pp. 1-89; [*The Number 1's Go Together, Fargo—the Number 1 Market in North Dakota! WDAY-TV—the Number 1 Station in Fargo*](#) (Advertising folder, ca. 1962); [*WDAY, Mike Notes*](#) (May 1962); [*North Dakotan*](#) (August 1965), pp. 2-3.

often irregular services with a consequent loss of interest. It was easy for automobiles and movies to take young people away from the Church. In the 1920's, rural congregations averaged about 110 members, and one minister often had to care for three or four churches.¹⁰ For example, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran church, the largest Lutheran synod in the state, had 538 congregations but only 162 pastors. It had more churches in the open country than any other denomination.

Rural churches were often in difficult straits. Pastors were hard to find and hard to keep, especially for the weaker denominations.¹¹ In the depression of the 1930's, Pastor Lambert J. Mehl, a young man serving several Missouri Synod Lutheran congregations in northwestern North Dakota, found himself taking in only forty dollars a month in salary but spending fifty dollars a month on the automobile which took him from one church to another. His people, however, brought him meat and staples, and he gave music lessons on the side for milk and butter.

Small salaries, constant traveling, and a rapid turnover of ministers were not merely a result of the rural character of the population. They were also a heritage of the over optimism of pioneer missionaries, who often founded churches which could not thrive. Stimulated by denominational rivalry, they established too many churches for the people to support. When settlement was completed in 1916, the state had 50 denominations and more than 2,500 churches. The result was a precarious existence and a high mortality rate. From 1926 to 1936, for example, many village churches and almost half the churches in the open country died, a total of 721 abandoned churches. But 546 new churches were born during the decade. Thus the total number declined only slowly, down to about: 2,000 by 1960.

The high mortality rate and the relative weakness of the small churches tended to impoverish the social and spiritual life of many people. This was truer for the older American stock, who were members of the stronger denominations in the eastern United States, than for the immigrant stock. In

¹⁰Richard M. Lunde, "A Statistical Summary of the North Dakota Denominations" (Seminar paper, Department of History, University of North Dakota, 1961), pp. 9-10.

¹¹Accounts of several denominations are found in unpublished M.A. theses: Marian E. McKechnie, "[Spiritual Pioneering: A History of the Synod of North Dakota, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.](#)" (University of North Dakota, 1955); Richard M. Lunde, "[History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in the Dakotas](#)" (University of North Dakota, 1959); Earl E.G. Linden, "[The History of Congregationalism in North Dakota](#)" (University of Chicago, 1939); Lambert J. Mehl, "[Missouri Grows to Maturity in North Dakota: A Regional History of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod of North Dakota](#)" (University of North Dakota, 1953).

North Dakota these denominations were forced to close more than half their churches. Thus the Congregationalists dropped from 236 churches in 1916 (the peak year for most of the denominations) to only 97 in 1960, the Methodists from 278 to 138, the Episcopalians from 88 to 36, and the Presbyterians from 182 to 96. Too few members closed the churches; in 1920 more than half the Congregational churches had less than 26 members. But with much larger congregations, the number of Lutheran churches only dropped from 1,060 in 1916 to 859 in 1960, and the number of Catholic churches from 352 to 320. Stability in the number of Catholic churches resulted from a large membership per church. Although there were many Catholic mission churches without resident priests, in 1936 the average membership of Catholic congregations in North Dakota was 348, compared with only 147 for all denominations.

The contrast in mortality is explained by the ethnic origins of the population. Scandinavians and Germans settled North Dakota, and they were largely Lutheran or Catholic. In 1916 there were 96,000 Catholics and 76,000 Lutherans in North Dakota, and they made up 76 percent of all church members in the state. Some other churches (German Baptist, German Congregationalist, Evangelical, and others) also appealed to the immigrants, and in 1960 the so-called "immigrant churches" had 87 percent of all church members in North Dakota, a larger percentage than they had in any other state.

Consequently, foreign languages were used more in North Dakota church services before the First World War than in those of any other state. At that time, 54 percent of the state's churches—with 63 percent of the church members—had foreign-language services, using thirteen languages. Language was a basis for the fourteen Lutheran synods in the state; there were several Norwegian and German synods, as well as one each of Finnish, Danish, and Swedish origin. Sometimes Catholic parishes were organized by language; for years the village of Minto had two Catholic churches, one with sermons in Polish and one, called "the Irish," with sermons in English. Dickinson had three Catholic churches, with sermons in English, Bohemian, and German.¹²

The language of the service became an emotion-charged issue in many churches. It often divided the older members, who wanted services in the language of the Old World home, from the younger members, who wanted services in English. During the First World War, strong popular feeling forced the elimination of German services, but many congregations resumed them after the war. The war, however, intensifying American nationalism,

¹² *Catholic Action News, Golden Jubilee Edition, Diocese of Fargo*, 1889-1939, p. 57.

hastened the transition to English services. Church leaders realized that they must Americanize their churches or lose the younger generation to older American denominations, such as the Methodists and Presbyterians.

When immigration virtually ceased in the 1920's, those denominations which had sought out the immigrants needed a new policy. In 1918 the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran church adopted a resolution looking toward English services, and in 1924 the district convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adopted a policy of more emphasis upon English and more work among non-Germans. The change was a gradual one, sometimes made under pressure from church leaders. Some services in English and some in an Old World language was usually a halfway stage. Norwegian services began to go before the First World War and pretty well disappeared in the 1920's.

German services held on longer, but in most churches using German, the English services predominated by 1936.¹³ Even in the 1930's in some German-Hungarian communities (Lefor, for example) the children did not learn English until they started school. As late as 1940, older members of the Evangelical church were saying: "If they don't like the German services, let them go elsewhere." Some of the younger people *were* going elsewhere. Not until the end of the Second World War did more North Dakota members of the Evangelical church subscribe to the church magazine published in English than to the one published in German.

After the war, it became more difficult to secure bilingual pastors, but the Catholic Diocese of Fargo met the need in Bohemian and Polish parishes with priests who had fled from Communist persecution in eastern Europe. In the early 1960's, some churches still held services in German.

But there had been a general shift to English services, which demonstrated the work of church leaders in Americanizing both the churches and their immigrant members. Every denomination had capable and energetic leaders. Among the Methodists were President Edward P. Robertson of Wesley College, a liberal who opposed revivalism; Frank Lynch of Casselton, a bonanza farmer who established a pension fund for ministers; the Reverend C. A. Armstrong, for many years the executive secretary of the North Dakota Council of Churches, an organization founded in 1919; and the Reverend C. Maxwell Brown, a thoughtful pastor of churches in Grand Forks and Fargo.

A Presbyterian layman, Ed Seblen of Bathgate, represented the kind of Christian leadership which improved community life in many North Dakota

¹³ Richard P. Uhlman, "Die Deutsche Kirkenarbeit in Nord Dakota" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1937), pp. 23, 34, 39, 141-143.

towns. At seventy-one in 1962, he was a powerfully built, broad-shouldered, modest retired farmer with an unruly thatch of white hair. He was an elder of his church and taught an adult Sunday School class. With his own money, his leadership in rounding up volunteer workers, and even his own labor, he sparked a whole series of projects for Bathgate (population 175): the rebuilding of a dam on the Tongue River, the conversion of the empty School for the Blind into a rest home, additions to the Presbyterian Church, and a new Masonic Temple.¹⁴

In the Evangelical church (Evangelical United Brethren after 1946), the Reverend C. F. Strutz (a zealous evangelist), the Reverend A. W. Heidinger (a big, strong, happy, outgoing person), and the Reverend A. G. Martin (a conference superintendent at thirty-six) were outstanding leaders. As conference superintendents, they carried their church through the trying days of the depression and then led in its rapid postwar growth.

There were many devoted Lutheran leaders. Four men served for many years as presidents of the North Dakota District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: Tietje Hinck (1910-1924), Joseph Klausler (1924-1941), Arnold H. Grumm (1942-1950), and Walter H. Crodts (1950—). After 1917, when the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran church was organized, three men served as presidents of its North Dakota District: I. D. Ylvisaker (1917-1926), David Stoeve (1926-1950), and Loyal E. Tallakson (1950-).

These were able men, but probably the most influential church leaders were the Catholic Bishops. One, Vincent Wehrle, became something of a legend in his own lifetime, loved and respected by Catholic and Protestant alike. After a long career as a missionary abbot of Assumption Abbey, he was Bishop of the Diocese of Bismarck from its creation in 1910 to his resignation in 1939 at the age of eighty-four. His fifty-two years as missionary and Bishop in North Dakota and his boundless energy and zeal for the cause of religion made him the leading churchman in the history of the state. Short, heavy-set, sharp-eyed, outspoken, Bishop Wehrle loved to rule and command. As Bishop he lived frugally in the old Thompson mansion in Bismarck, once called “the most elegant residence” in North Dakota. A man of deep convictions, he opposed the Nonpartisan League because of its socialist organizers and warned his people against following pro-German leaders in the First World War. He also loved and understood the German Russians and German-Hungarians of his flock. Bishop Wehrle’s successor was Vincent J. Ryan, a leader in the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. As head of the Diocese of Bismarck, Bishop Ryan became a great builder—ten million dollars’ worth of new construction in eleven years.

¹⁴[*Grand Forks Herald*](#), July 15, 1962.

The Diocese of Fargo also had capable Bishops. John Shanley's successor in 1910 was James O'Reilly. Born in Ireland and ordained before emigrating to the United States, he was a pastor in Minneapolis and a friend of the famous Archbishop John Ireland for many years before coming to Fargo. Impatient with sham and pretense, he was a gentle person devoted to the faithful in the distant prairie parishes. In spite of the hard times, the diocese grew wonderfully under his care: 34 new parishes, 56 new churches, 24 schools, 7 hospital buildings, and 54 rectories. At Bishop O'Reilly's funeral in 1934, Bishop Welch said: "He loved the quiet of his study and the companionship of books."

Bishop O'Reilly was followed by the Right Reverend Aloisius J. Muench. Born in Milwaukee the son of German immigrants, Bishop Muench did graduate work at the University of Wisconsin and at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, before joining the faculty of the Seminary of St. Francis, his alma mater. A driving perfectionist, he was rector of the seminary and only forty-six when Pope Pius XI made him Bishop of Fargo in 1935. A small man and a professor, he had a tireless energy and a German thoroughness, as well as a real knowledge of the problems of rural people.

However, Bishop Muench won the greatest recognition for his work in Germany. He went to that country after the Second World War, first as an intermediary between the United States Army and the Catholic hierarchy and soon as the representative of Pope Pius XII. When the West German Federal Republic came into being in 1951, the Pope made Bishop Muench Papal Nuncio, and he became the dean of the diplomatic corps at Bonn. For his work in Germany, Pope John XXIII elevated him to the College of Cardinals in 1959, the only instance in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States when the Bishop of a small diocese has been so honored. When Bishop Muench went to Germany in 1946, he remained Bishop of Fargo, but the administration of the diocese went to the Auxiliary Bishop, the Right Reverend Leo F. Dworschak, a graduate of St. John's University at Collegeville, Minnesota, and a tall, efficient administrator who had been in the diocese since 1926.

Other clergy, though not holding positions of such authority, also served the churches of North Dakota long and well. Preaching the Gospel and living by its precepts, they often left a deep impression upon their communities. One such man was the Reverend Homer R. Harrington, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Grand Forks for twenty-eight years (1930-1958). After growing up in Jamestown and seeing suffering and death on the battlefields of France, he had attended Seabury Theological Seminary (Faribault, Minnesota) and then, as a traveling archdeacon, won the affection of both Indian and white Episcopalians over the state before going to St. Paul's. A

liberal who was a member of the Church League for Industrial Democracy, he took part in mitigating the hardships of the 1930's, soliciting work for the unemployed, helping to bring about the hiring of a trained social worker by Grand Forks, and acting as an unofficial adviser to the unions, which put a victorious labor ticket in the 1934 municipal election. Through the years he was a diligent visitor of his hospitalized parishioners, wisely counseled people in all walks of life, gained the respect of the whole community, Catholic and Protestant alike, and near the end of his ministry built a new St. Paul's with jewel-like stained-glass windows.

The Reverend Mr. Harrington's liberalism, however, was a minority position. In 1934 the North Dakota clergy, according to a *Literary Digest* poll, opposed the New Deal of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, although a majority of the bankers, businessmen, and educators in the state favored it.

Strong church leaders brought about increased church membership. The rural character of the population and its need to overcome the isolation of the lonely prairie also contributed to growth. No other social organization bringing people together was nearly as important as the Church. In 1936, for example, the state had 212 women's clubs, 1,078 Farmers' Union locals, 1,390 secret fraternal societies, and 2,097 churches. The schools brought only children together, and school enrollment was only a fraction of church membership.

The growth of church membership was rapid, much more so in North Dakota than in the nation and probably than in any other state. By 1960 the state's population was only a few thousand more than in 1916, but church membership had doubled. It rose from 225,000 in 1916 to 450,000 in 1960. In 1916 only 36 percent of the population were church members, a figure well below the national average of 42 percent. But in 1960 an impressive 71 percent were church members, a figure well above the national average of 63 percent. Such a great increase in church membership must have changed profoundly the tone of North Dakota life.

The growth was neither evenly divided throughout the period nor among the denominations. The number of Lutherans increased very rapidly from 1916 to 1926, the years of federal censuses of religious bodies. Only the Catholics had much growth in the hard years from 1926 to 1936, and the Presbyterians and Episcopalians lost heavily. Then, in the postwar years, the Lutherans had by far the largest increase, some 60 percent of the total growth. A comparison of figures for 1916 and 1960 shows that some denominations, such as the Congregationalists, grew hardly at all; many important ones (Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Evangelical United Brethren, Episcopalians) grew about 50 percent; but the Lutherans grew an astonishing 184 percent.

Two things may help to explain the great Lutheran increase: the dying out of resentments toward state Lutheran churches brought over from the Old World, and the strength and wide distribution of Lutheran churches in North Dakota. In 1916 the membership of the Lutheran churches consisted of only one-third of the people with Lutheran backgrounds living in the state. It may be that strong feelings against the state Lutheran churches in their Old World homes kept many of the immigrants from becoming church members when they settled in North Dakota, but that when those feelings faded with the passing years, they joined the Lutheran synods established in America in large numbers.¹⁵ Whatever the reason, the Lutheran churches experienced an astonishing growth from 1916 to 1926, adding nearly 59,000 members, or three-fourths of the total gain in membership of all churches.

The Lutheran churches also grew rapidly in the years after the Second World War. By that time the various synods had lost their character as distinctly the churches of Norwegian, Swedish, and German stocks; many people of other nationalities were joining the Lutheran churches. It was entirely natural for them to do so. There were Lutheran congregations in virtually every community in the state; in 1950 there were 930 Lutheran churches but only 346 incorporated places in North Dakota. Moreover, in nearly every community a Lutheran church was the largest and most thriving Protestant congregation. Size and vigor naturally attracted new members. Little wonder that in the 1950's, although the Lutheran churches had less than half of all the church members in the state, they had 58 percent of the growth in membership.

The uneven rates of growth changed the relative strength of the various denominations. In 1916 the Catholics had made up 42 percent of the membership, the Lutherans 34 percent, and all other denominations 24 percent. But by 1960 the Catholics made up 34 percent, the Lutherans 48 percent, and all other denominations only 18 percent. Nearly half of all church members were Lutherans; by percentage, North Dakota was the most Lutheran state in the nation and was steadily becoming more so.

Although the doubling of church membership was the most significant change, there were others—responses to population shifts and economic conditions. Starting in the depressed 1930's, hard-pressed country churches were consolidating with larger village churches, and farmers were becoming members of churches in town. The Evangelical United Brethren and the

¹⁵On religious conflict in Norway and Sweden, see Theodore C. Blegen, [*Norwegian Migration to America*](#) (2 vols.; Northfield, Minn.: Norwegian-American Historical Society, 1931-1940), I, 17, 30-31, 156-167; George M. Stephenson, [*Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration: A Study of Immigrant Churches*](#) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1932), pp. 2-6, 24-25.

Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which had formerly concentrated their work in rural areas, began to establish town churches. The figures show the trend: in 1926 North Dakota had 877 open-country churches, in 1960 only 466.

Another change was the increase in the number of Lutheran Sunday Schools and Catholic classes in Christian doctrine. When they realized that children of their families were often attending the Sunday Schools of the Methodists and other denominations, they themselves began to stress religious education. The Lutheran increase in such work started in the 1920's, the Catholic increase in the 1940's; the programs of both grew in the 1950's, and the membership of Methodist and other Protestant Sunday Schools declined steadily from their 1916 peaks. Membership in Catholic Christian-doctrine classes, often held on Saturday, increased 400 percent from 1936 to 1960.

With the passing years, all of the churches became more cosmopolitan, less the organizations of particular nationalities. The mixing of such groups by intermarriage played an important part in the process. In 1961, for example, the Catholic clergy of the Diocese of Fargo performed 550 Catholic marriages and 298 mixed marriages.

A result of growing cosmopolitanism was the union of several Lutheran synods. In 1917, three Norwegian synods in the United States had merged to form the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. It was the largest synod with congregations in North Dakota. In 1946, the word "Norwegian" was dropped from the name, a sign of advancing cosmopolitanism. In 1960 and 1962 it was one of the Norwegian, German, and Danish synods in the United States which merged to form the American Lutheran Church. The new name was significant. With 170,000 members in North Dakota, it became the largest church in the state, a position previously held by the Catholic church, which had about 153,000 members.

The memberships of other leading denominations were: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 27,000; Methodist, 20,000; Lutheran Church in America, 15,000; Presbyterian, 14,500; Congregational Christian, 7,000; Evangelical United Brethren, 6,000; North American Baptist, 5,000; and Protestant Episcopal, 3,500. Ten of the fifty-nine denominations in the state had 94 percent of all church members. In 1962, German, Swedish, Finnish, and Danish synods in the United States merged to form the Lutheran Church in America, thereby reducing the number of Lutheran synods in North Dakota from eleven to five. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the second largest synod in the United States, was not involved, but one of its North Dakota pastors, Lambert J. Mehl, wrote in 1953: "The transition from a German-speaking semi-foreign body in the beginning to a truly American

church has been accomplished.”

Cosmopolitanism was furthered by the radio broadcast of services, for such broadcasts extended the outreach of the larger churches. In September, 1927, the United Lutheran Church in Grand Forks, later the largest congregation in the state, began a regular broadcast of its Sunday service. About 1930 the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod began regular broadcasts over WDAY in Fargo and KFYZ in Bismarck.

Other changes grew out of postwar prosperity. Giving per member increased markedly; in the Evangelical United Brethren church, which ranked high in this respect, it rose from \$57 per member in 1947 to \$94 per member in 1958. The number of ministers increased by 136 from 1950 to 1960. Everywhere congregations were building new churches. The Roman Catholics, for example, completed the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit and the million-dollar St. Mary's High School in Bismarck, the Priory of the Annunciation nearby on Apple Creek, Sacred Heart Convent in Minot, and many new schools and churches. The Diocese of Bismarck received \$90,000 from the Catholic Church Extension Society for the building of churches and rectories in the weaker missions. Since 1910 the society had given the diocese \$258,000.

Such outside aid came to most of the denominations in the state. The scattered population, the many competing denominations, and the many small congregations made it a necessity. Thus the national council of the Protestant Episcopal church gave its missionary district in North Dakota a large annual subsidy; it was \$75,000 in 1958, even though Episcopal giving in the state had increased 300 percent in recent years.

In the prosperous postwar years, however, the trend was toward financial independence. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod achieved it in 1945 and the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1955. Independence was more difficult for the 3,500 Episcopalians in North Dakota, but it was the principal goal of the Right Reverend Richard R. Emery. A stocky, sincere churchman as well as a former hockey player at the University of Minnesota, he had been rector of St. Paul's, Minneapolis. Then in 1951 he was made Bishop of the Episcopal missionary district of North Dakota at the age of forty-one. Finding that only four of the thirty-one Episcopal congregations in the state were able to support themselves, he bluntly told North Dakota Episcopalians that it was “high time that the church in North Dakota left behind its depression philosophy and adopted an aggressive attitude.” Bishop Emery soon launched a campaign for a \$500,000 episcopate endowment fund to make the missionary district self-supporting.