

North Dakota

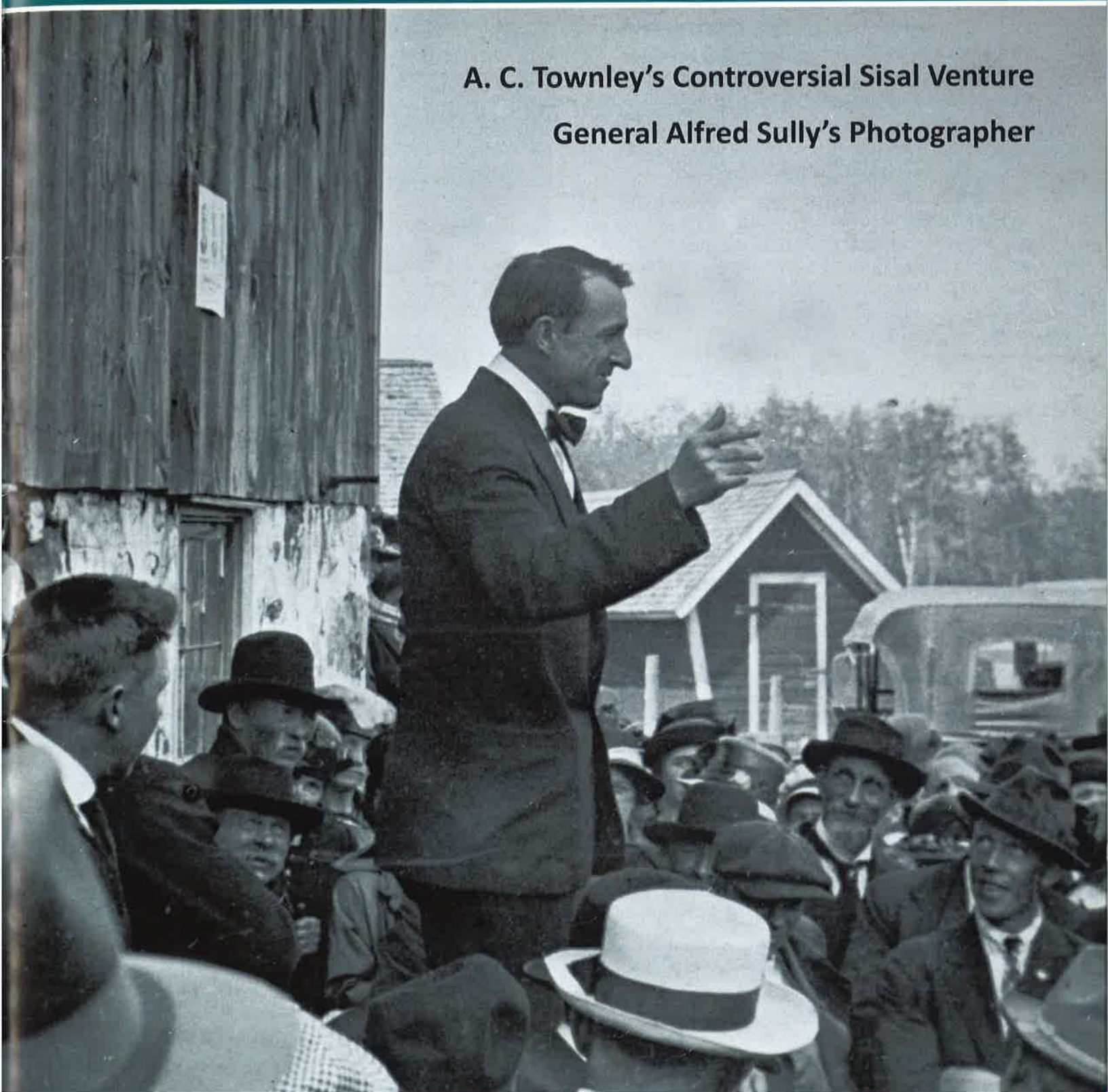
HISTORY

JOURNAL OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS

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A. C. Townley's Controversial Sisal Venture

General Alfred Sully's Photographer



FROM THE COLLECTIONS

German-Russian Family Donates Sick Call Set

Losing loved ones was a routine part of life for most immigrants to North Dakota; accidents, infant mortality, and death from disease or illness called many home. Germans from Russia, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, were devout in their religious practices. Among Catholics, a *Gottes Eck* (God's Corner), or *Liberherrgottseck*, was common in most homes. Usually in the parlor or main room of the home, this sick call set consisted of a shelf with a crucifix, a bottle of holy water, and blessed candles, and was often flanked by religious prints on the adjacent walls. All of these items were necessary as a family gathered to pray for sick and dying family members. If a priest arrived to perform anointing of the sick, or last rites, a Eucharistic host (unleavened bread) would be placed on the paten (plate), and the spoon would be used to administer wine. *Gottes Eck* are still found in homes across North Dakota.

Gabriel and Helena Schaff were born in the Catholic village of Speyer, Beresan Villages, near Neu Odessa (northeast of Odessa), Russia. The Schaffs and their three children arrived in New York City on November 20, 1902, sailing from Bremen, Germany, on the North German Lloyd vessel *Friedrich Der Grosse*. They settled in rural St. Anthony, Morton County, and had five more children. This sick call set, donated by Gabriel and Helena's grandson Jerome H. Schaff of Bismarck, was used in the home of his parents, John G. Schaff (1904–83) and Pauline Schaff (1908–82), in rural Huff, North Dakota.

Mark J. Halvorson, curator of collections research,
Audience Engagement & Museum Division



Sick call wall cabinet with equipment
SHSND 2010.91.1.6



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THE BANK OF NORTH DAKOTA



On the cover: A. C. Townley addressing Nonpartisan League meeting in Glenco, Minnesota, 1916. Townley's success as Nonpartisan League president came primarily from his ability to stoke the anger of farmers, but errors in his sisal scheme would play a major role in his downfall. SHSND SA B0924-00001

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GENERAL SULLY'S PHOTOGRAPHER

Private Byron H. Gurnsey and the Northwest Indian Expedition of 1865

BY EPHRIAM D. DICKSON III



Quarters of Post Surgeon & Post Commandant Fort Berthold, Dakota Ter. in 1865

"Quarters of Post Surgeon & Post Commandant, Fort Berthold, Dakota Ter. in 1865." Comparisons of the known movements of the identified individuals in this photograph confirm the image was taken in 1865 during General Alfred Sully's third and final expedition into Dakota Territory. *Minnesota Historical Society*



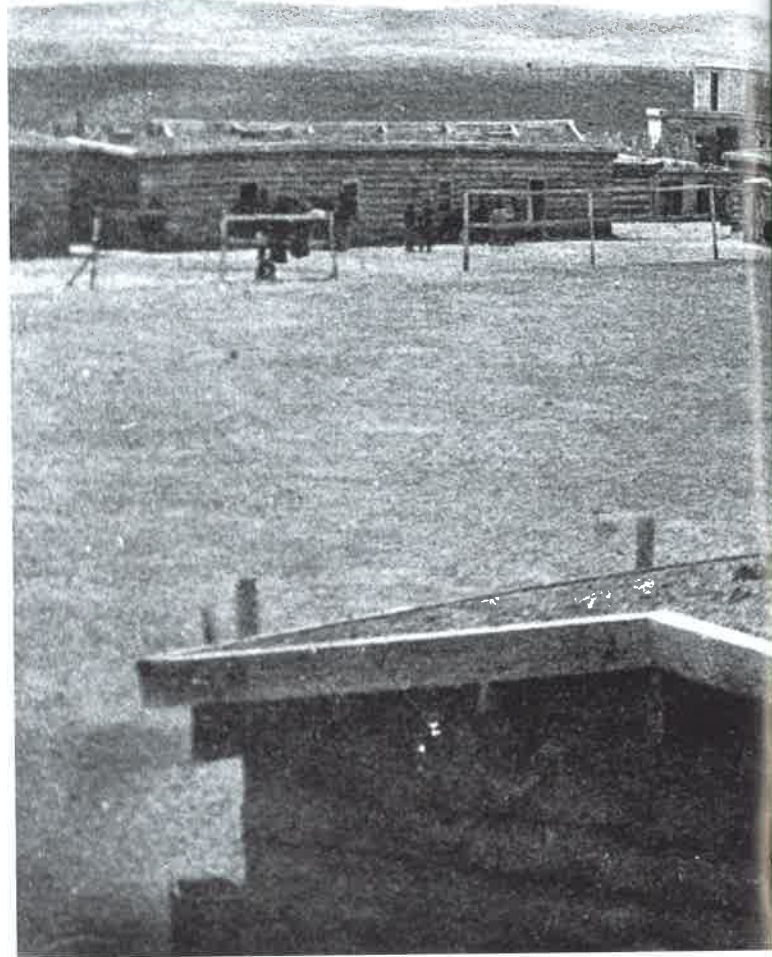
Byron H. Gurnsey (1833–80), circa 1870. *Courtesy Curt Johnson*

Between 1863 and 1865, Brigadier General Alfred Sully led three expeditions against American Indian tribes on the Upper Missouri River, attacking people of all three divisions of Dakota at Whitestone Hill and later at Killdeer Mountain. Published histories of Sully's campaigns have often included several images variously attributed to one of his expeditions, suggesting that an unnamed photographer had accompanied the general on at least one occasion. But who was this elusive artist and, assuming that all of the images were taken at about the same time, with which of Sully's three expeditions did he travel?

Early photographic prints such as those from the Sully expedition frequently do not bear an imprint naming the original photographer, making attribution and dating of the images difficult. Without this crucial information, determining why the images were produced can be challenging and their value as historical documents diminished. But sometimes, this lost context can be reconstructed. The evidence assembled here conclusively identifies Private Byron H. Gurnsey as the artist, travelling with Sully's third and final expedition in 1865.

Determining Identity

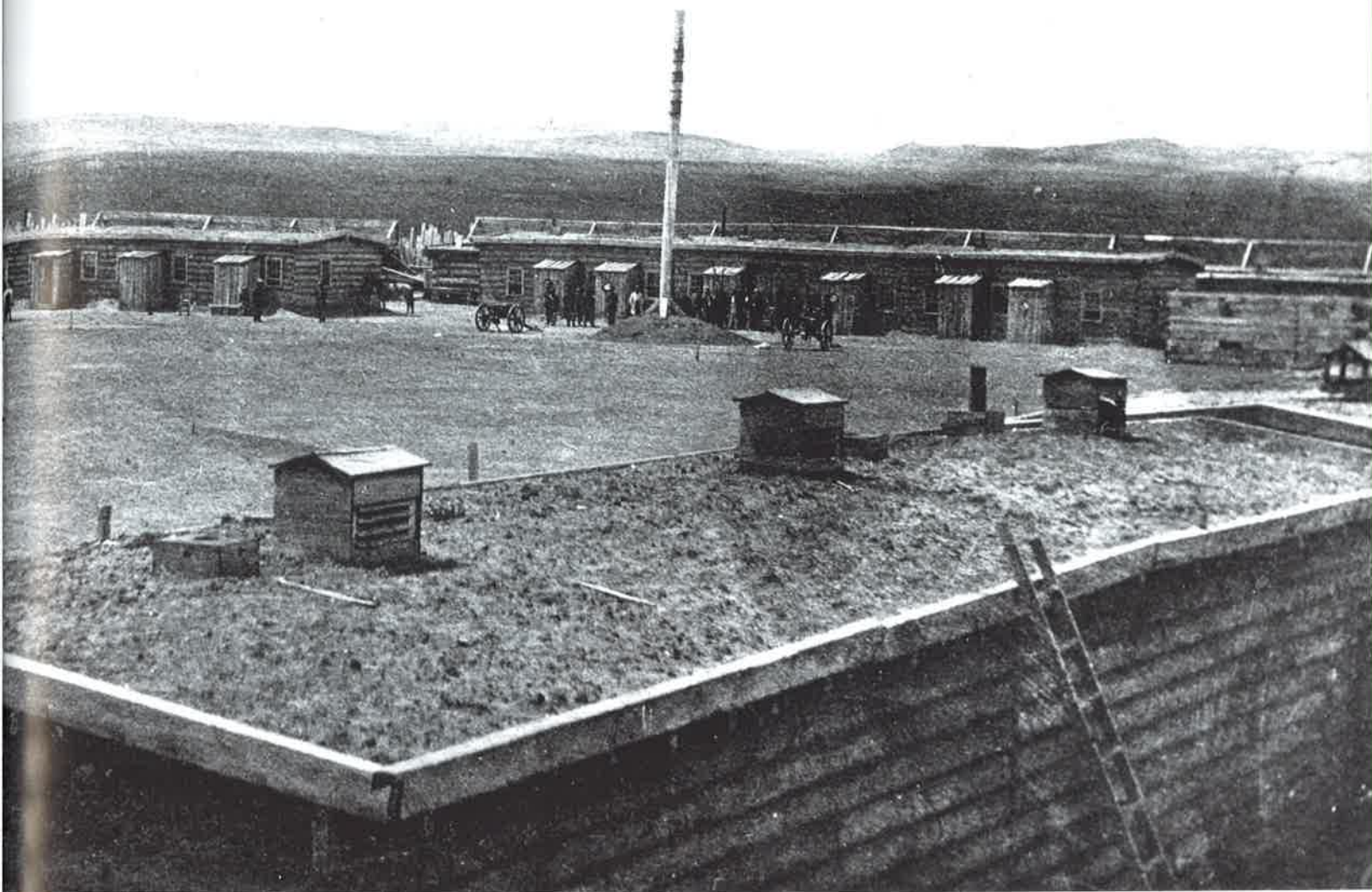
The first step in photographic analysis is to assemble all related images presumed to have been taken by the same photographer at approximately the same time, allowing



them to be studied together as a single body of work. From this, clues within the images and their paper mounts can help reconnect them to other documents and restore some part of their historical context. To date, at least fifteen images have been identified from Sully's expeditions.

Of particular interest is the page 3 photo, a view showing army officers and civilians gathered around a cannon inside the compound at Fort Berthold, Dakota Territory. Four of these individuals were specifically identified on a surviving copy of the image: F. F. Gerard, Capt. Dimon, Capt. Upton and Dr. "Krappier." Historical records can now be used to narrow down the timeframe when all four men were simultaneously present at Fort Berthold and thus determine which of Sully's three expeditions included a photographer.

Located on the north bank of the Missouri River in what is today North Dakota, Fort Berthold was originally established in 1845 as a fur trading post adjacent to the fortified earthlodge village of the Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras. After the original trading post burned in 1862, the American Fur Company bought out a nearby competitor and operated their fort until its sale to the Northwest Fur



In July 1865, troops assembled at Fort Rice on the Missouri River where General Sully's expedition was formally organized. This photograph showing the interior of Fort Rice is unattributed but was probably taken by Private Byron H. Gurnsey at that time. *Minnesota Historical Society*

After departing Fort Rice, Sully's expedition encountered a camp of Métis who had been hunting buffalo. Their distinctive two-wheeled wooden carts were arranged into circular corrals to protect their horses and oxen. Photo by Private Byron H. Gurnsey near Devils Lake, Dakota Territory, July 1865. *Minnesota Historical Society*



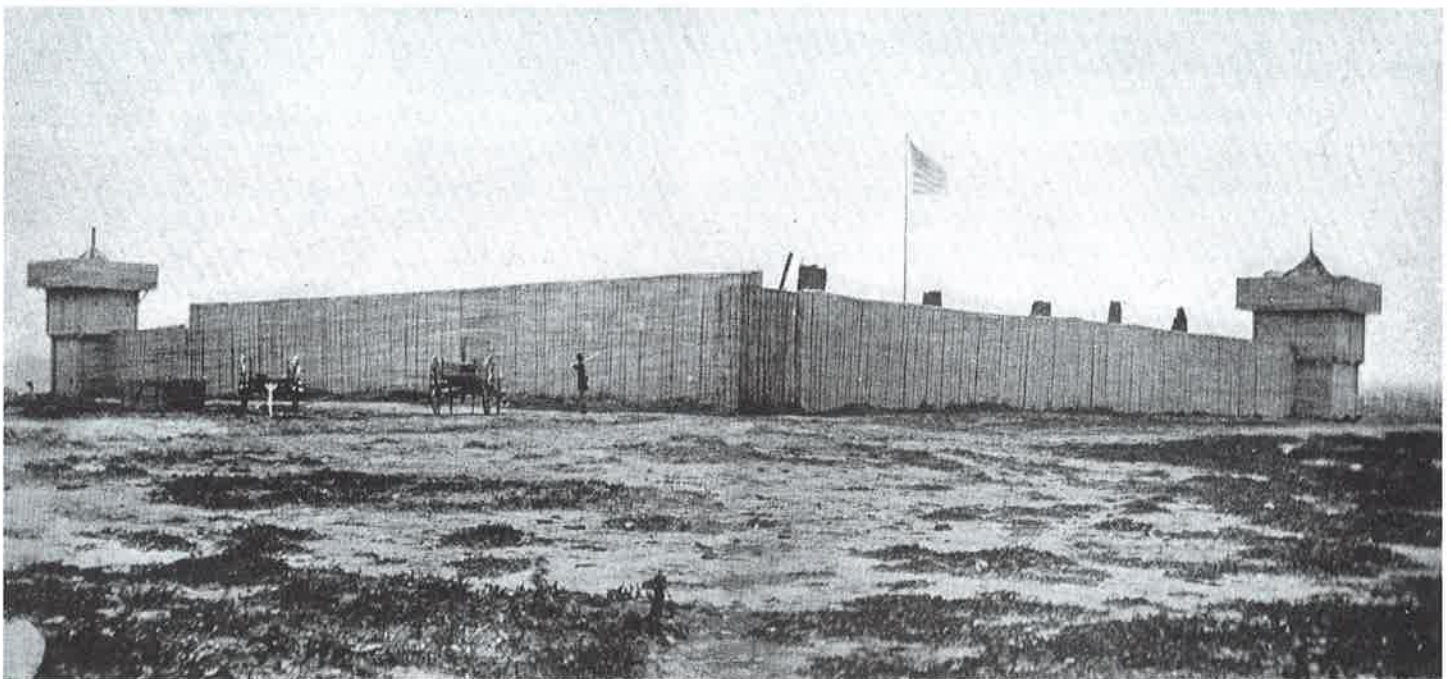
Company in 1865. During the Civil War, the head trader at Fort Berthold was thirty-five-year-old Frederic F. Gerard. Born in St. Louis and well educated, Gerard was just sixteen when he first traveled west, lured by tales of adventure. After working as a clerk in the fur trade at Fort Pierre and later Fort Clark, he was appointed as the trader at Fort Berthold in 1855 and remained for more than a decade. Given his long residence at this trading post, his appearance in this image does not help to refine the date.¹

The identification of two army officers and a medical surgeon in the photograph, however, is much more helpful. A company of the Sixth Iowa Cavalry was stationed at Fort Berthold in the fall of 1864 in an effort to protect the village tribes against attacks from Dakota or Lakota war parties. On May 14, 1865, these troops were relieved by Company K First US Volunteers, commanded by Captain Benjamin R. Dimon, one of the individuals identified on page 3. Dimon was soon afterward joined by Dr. Harry C. Crapper, sent to care for the health of these troops. Three months later, Dimon's company was ordered to Fort Rice and departed Fort Berthold on August 26. This chronology establishes that the page 3 photo was taken in August 1865 as Sully's third and final expedition rested at Fort Berthold and socialized with Dimon's company. Assuming that all fifteen images were taken during this same season, this evidence conclusively demonstrates that the photographer was traveling with Sully's 1865 expedition.

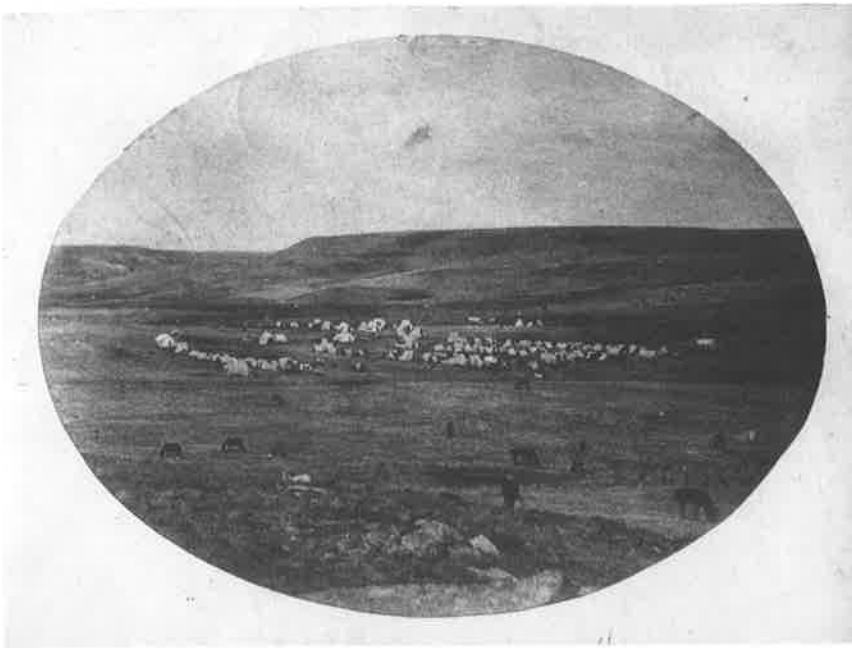
But who was this unnamed artist? Several examples of the original 1865 expedition photographs are today preserved within Sully's personal papers, leading some scholars to



As commander of the Department of Iowa, Brigadier General Alfred Sully (1820–79) led three expeditions through Dakota Territory. Portrait with imprint of Byron H. Gurnsey, circa 1865–66. SHSND SA A4447-00001



On August 8, 1865, Sully's expedition arrived at Fort Berthold, an important trading post on the Missouri River located adjacent to the fortified earthlodge village of the Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras. Unattributed but probably by Private Byron H. Gurnsey, August 1865. Published in Olin D. Wheeler, *The Trail of Lewis and Clark* (1904). SHSND SA 917.8 W565 v01 p277



"Camp of Brackett's Battalion," near Devils Lake, Dakota Territory. Brackett's Battalion, comprising three companies of the Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry under the command of Major Alfred B. Brackett, participated in Sully's second and third expeditions into Dakota Territory. Photo by Private Byron H. Gurnsey, July 1865. SHSND SA C0808-00001

speculate that perhaps the general may have been the photographer. While Sully was the son of an artist and a skilled painter himself, no historical documentation has survived to confirm that he had expanded his activities into photography. Busy with the many details of a large military expedition, it seems unlikely that the commanding officer would have had the leisure time to engage in the complicated and time-consuming process of wet-plate photography while leading an American Indian campaign. Another of the surviving Fort Berthold images was originally owned by army surgeon Dr. Washington Matthews. He did not arrive at the fort however until September 5, 1865, several weeks after Dimon and the Sully expedition had already departed. No doubt both Sully and Matthews had simply obtained personal copies of these images at a later time.²

Commercial photographers were sometimes allowed to accompany army expeditions in the field, however, none of the surviving official correspondence, personal journals, or newspaper accounts of the 1865 expedition mention such an artist. But a review of the muster rolls for units assigned to the expedition yielded an unexpected discovery. Among the names listed in Company M Seventh Iowa Cavalry was Private Byron H. Gurnsey, better known after the war as a successful photographer in Sioux City, Iowa, and later in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Until now, his service in the Seventh Iowa Cavalry had been completely overlooked. Could the photographs from Sully's expedition have been taken by Private Gurnsey, perhaps representing the beginning of his photographic career while still serving in uniform?³

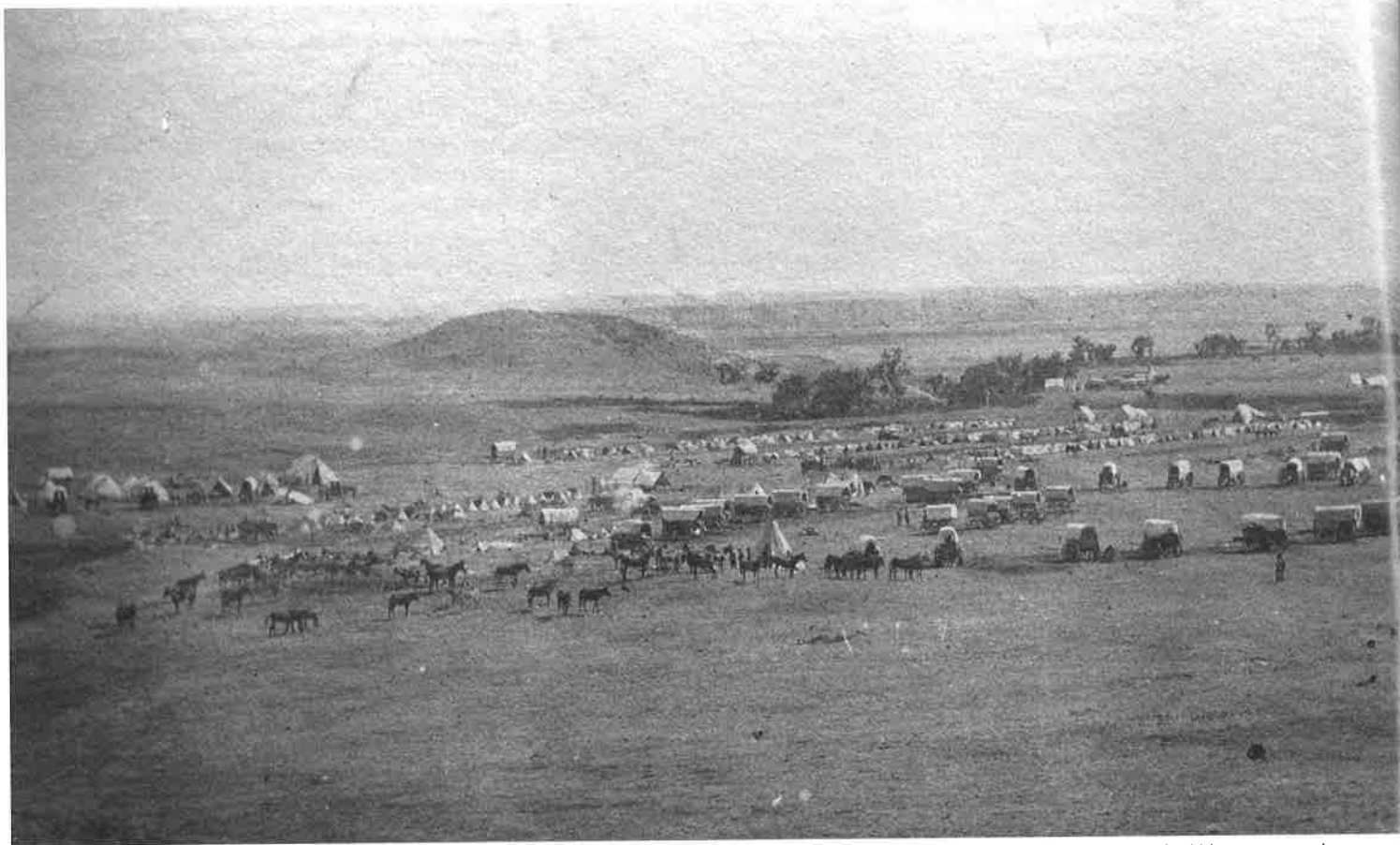
A search of the Yankton and Sioux City newspapers for this period yielded the final confirmation. In March 1866, several months before he and his company were

mustered out of the service, Gurnsey was allowed to fit up several rooms for a photographic studio in the territorial Capitol Building in Yankton. To help market his services, he presented the editor of the local newspaper with examples of his work, including "a number of interesting views of the Forts and camps on the upper Missouri, taken by himself, during the march of Gen. Sully's expedition, last season." Here was the conclusive documentary proof. Private Byron H. Gurnsey had in fact traveled with General Sully's Northwest Indian Expedition in 1865 as a soldier-photographer, and these surviving images can now be properly attributed as examples of his early work.⁴

Early Images

Artists had been traveling up the Missouri River for decades, hoping to capture glimpses of the wild frontier. In 1832, painter George Catlin was allowed passage on the American Fur Company's steamboat *Yellow Stone* for its maiden voyage up the Missouri River, where he sketched and painted among the Native tribes. The following year, Karl Bodmer accompanied the German Prince Maximilian zu Wied-Neuwied on this same route as he drew scenes of the nobleman's adventure. John Mix Stanley brought the first known camera into the region as part of the Stevens expedition in 1853, followed five years later by artist Carl Wimar. Photographer James D. Hutton accompanied Captain William F. Reynolds on his mapping expedition in 1859–60, several images from which have survived.⁵

By the Civil War, technological advances in photography, including the introduction of the collodion or wet-plate process, had revolutionized the industry. The chemicals and materials for capturing an image were now easier to use and less temperamental to environmental conditions. In addition, the war created a burgeoning new commercial market for imagery as a picture-hungry public enjoyed



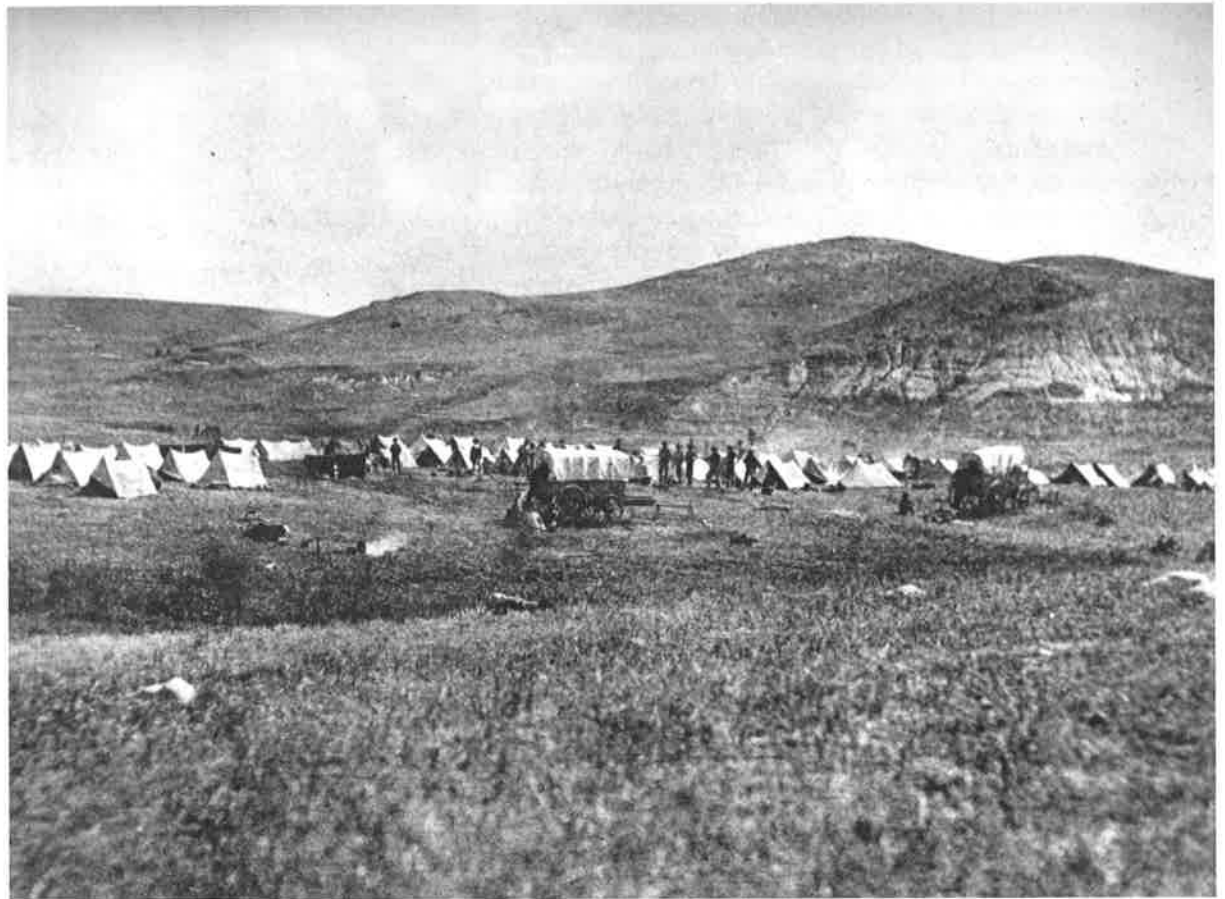
Camp of Sixth Iowa Volunteer Cavalry near Fort Berthold. As Sully's expedition camped at Fort Berthold for two weeks to rest, Gurnsey unpacked his camera and produced a number of images of their encampments. By Private Byron H. Gurnsey, August 1865. *Minnesota Historical Society*

views of Civil War battlefields and exotic foreign countries. The American West offered a range of new photographic opportunities for artists, both with its expansive scenery as well as new markets for the sale of photographic services and products. During the Civil War, several artists established galleries in communities along the edge of the Missouri River frontier, including at Sioux City, Iowa, and Yankton, Dakota Territory.

These latest developments in photography, however, were probably far from the mind of twenty-eight-year-old Byron H. Gurnsey as he considered his options at the beginning of the Civil War. Born October 23, 1833, in Chautauqua County, New York, Gurnsey had been raised by his mother's family following the death of his parents. At age thirteen, he moved with relatives to LaPorte County, Indiana, where he worked as a farmer while living with his uncle. He met Ida Simpson in the summer of 1858, and they were married after a six-month courtship. Their first child was born the following year. Just before the war, Gurnsey moved his growing family to Clinton County, Iowa, to be closer to his wife's parents, where he continued to farm and also worked as a carpenter.⁶

With the outbreak of armed conflict in 1861, President Abraham Lincoln called upon the states for volunteer troops

to put down the rebellion. Throughout Iowa, recruiting celebrations attracted thousands of new recruits, the state raising nineteen regiments during the first year of the war alone. Leaving his wife and infant daughter with her parents, Gurnsey was among those who first answered the call, enlisting in October 1861 in Company C Fourteenth Iowa Volunteer Infantry. While most of his regiment was sent east to fight the Confederacy, Companies A, B, and C were detached as a separate battalion under the command of Captain John Pattee and sent instead to the newly organized Dakota Territory. Thousands of volunteer soldiers were assigned to forts on the western frontier to replace the regular Army units brought east to fight in the widening Civil War. Traveling by rail from Davenport to the end of the line at Iowa City, Private Gurnsey and his column then marched to Sioux City, the jumping off point for the Upper Missouri. The battalion continued on to Fort Randall, located 150 miles upriver above Sioux City, where they were to relieve two companies of the Fourth US Artillery needed back East for the war. Despite the closure of steamboat traffic for the season and their lack of winter clothing such as greatcoats, the three companies of Iowa soldiers marched out on to the northern plains, finally reaching their new assignment on December 5, 1861.⁷



Camp of Seventh Iowa Volunteer Cavalry. By Private Byron H. Gurnsey near Fort Berthold, August 1865. SHSND SA 00004-00009

To the men of Pattee's battalion, Fort Randall must have appeared very primitive and isolated. Established in 1856 on the west bank of the river, the garrison's buildings consisted mostly of simple log structures for officers' quarters, enlisted barracks, and warehouses, laid out around a central parade field. Here the soldiers gathered in formation each morning for guard mount followed by a day filled with drills, chopping wood, and repairing buildings. "The duty here is not very hard," wrote Sergeant Amos R. Cherry of Company B Fourteenth Iowa Infantry. "Privates only comes on [guard] duty once in two weeks or once in fourteen days, corporals comes on once in nine days and the Seargants once in twelve days." Totalling eleven officers and about 275 enlisted men, the Iowa battalion endured their first Dakota winter.⁸

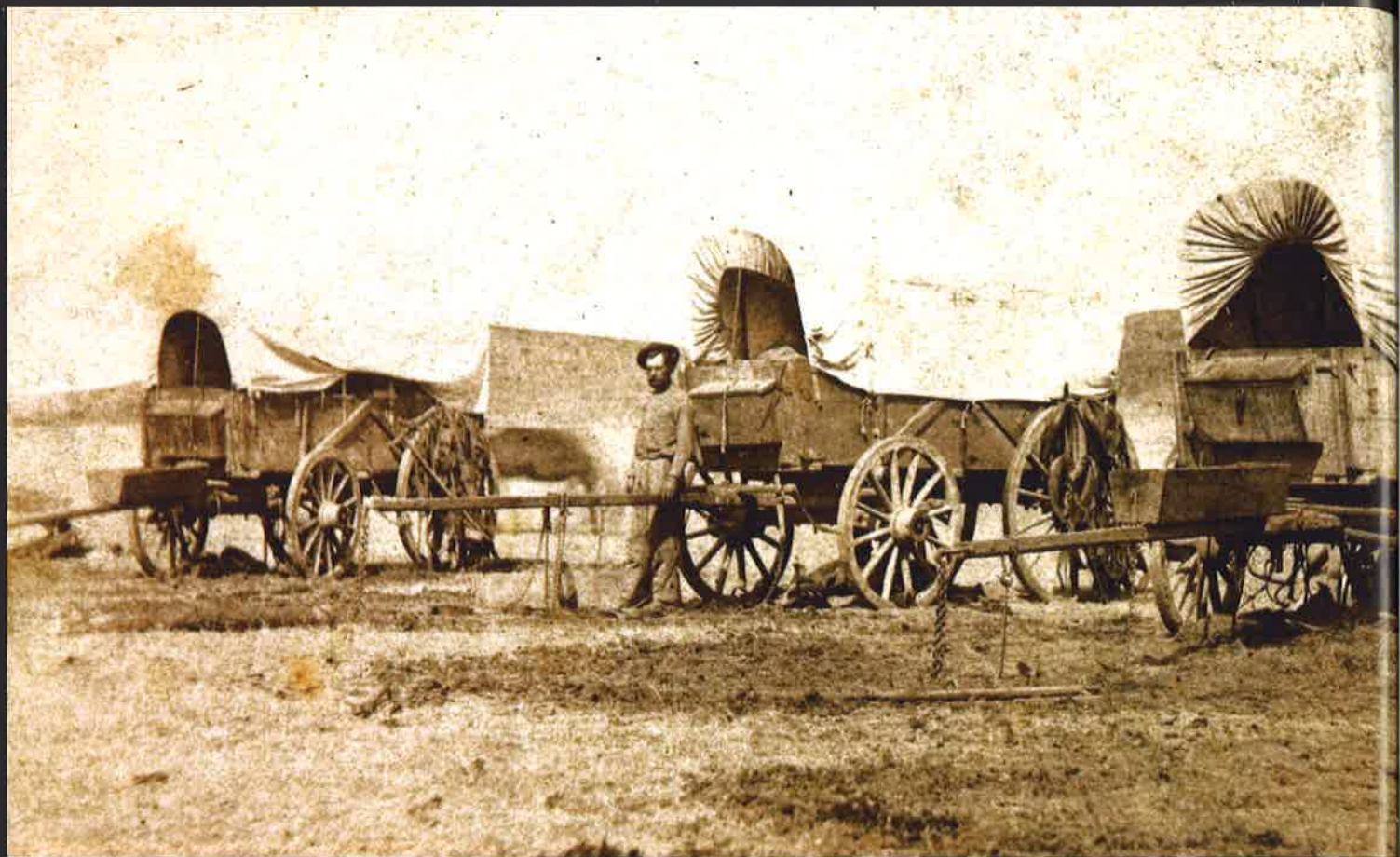
The US-Dakota War of 1862 and Aftermath

In 1862, as the Civil War continued to rage in the East, a conflict with the Eastern Dakota erupted much closer to Fort Randall. After enduring years of settlers pushing into Minnesota, the Santee had signed a treaty in 1851 that gave up most of their land in exchange for a narrow reservation along the Minnesota River and for annual annuities to support their families. But white settlers continued to press in on the remaining Santee land, and with the decreasing game and the failure of promised

annuities to often reach them, an increasingly desperate situation developed. Broken promises and deep distrust between Native communities and white settlers finally boiled over into what has become known as the US-Dakota War of 1862. Following Colonel Henry H. Sibley's defeat of the bands at Wood Lake in September 1862, over one thousand Santee surrendered, three hundred of whom were tried and sentenced to death. President Lincoln pardoned all but thirty-nine individuals. The Santee who escaped the conflict either fled north into British Canada or headed west to join their Lakota and Yanktonai relatives on the northern plains.⁹

From the perspective of frontier settler communities like that at Fort Randall, the arrival of refugee Santee in Dakota Territory threatened to destabilize white-Lakota relations. "From what we can learn, they are forming coalitions with the upper bands of the Sioux nation," speculated one Fort Randall resident in November 1862, "with the intention of inaugurating a wholesale system of aggression and violence upon the Whites next spring." Such comments reflected the growing fear of many that the Upper Missouri River was now also on the verge of an explosive Indian war.¹⁰

In the summer of 1863, the US Army launched two punitive expeditions into the Upper Missouri River region.





"Head Qrs Wagons, Genl Sully's comd."
By Private Byron H. Gurnsey near
Fort Berthold, August 1865. *Alfred Sully
Papers, Western Americana Collection,
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript
Library, Yale University*



Captain Nathan Pope's battery of mountain
howitzers. By Private Byron H. Gurnsey
near Fort Berthold, August 1865.
SHSND SAA5218-00001

Sibley marched west from Minnesota and fought several skirmishes, pushing some of the bands further west. Brigadier General Alfred Sully marched his column up the Missouri River and in September 1863, attacked a large village of Yanktonai, Lakota, and Santee near Whitestone Hill, the tribes suffering heavy casualties and the destruction of lodges, buffalo meat, and hides being gathered for the winter. With their horses worn out and winter approaching, Sully's men retraced their steps back down the Missouri River to their staging area at Farm Island, near present Pierre, South Dakota. Here he ordered the establishment of a new post as part of his larger plan to distribute troops at various points along the Missouri River. This new garrison was initially known as Fort Bartlett but was soon rechristened as Fort Sully.¹¹

Gurnsey entered the army as a carpenter and emerged as a photographer.

Private Gurnsey's company did not participate in General Sully's first expedition, instead remaining on routine garrison duty at Fort Randall. The battalion was renamed a part of the Forty-first Iowa Infantry and then in April 1863, redesignated as companies K, L, and M of the Seventh Iowa Volunteer Cavalry. A mounted unit in name only, the soldiers continued to be equipped as infantry. During this period, Gurnsey was permitted to bring his wife, Ida, and their four-year-old daughter, Carrie, to Fort Randall, joining the large community of "camp followers" living at the post. The commander however soon expressed concern about this growing burden of women and children and in early August 1863, all families except the authorized company laundresses were ordered to be sent away, "creating quite a commotion within the crinoline circle," a Yankton newspaper reported. Gurnsey's wife, now eight months pregnant with their second child, was allowed to remain as one of the laundresses, and their son, Schuyler, was born at Fort Randall the following month.¹²

In October 1863, the three companies of the Seventh Iowa Cavalry were ordered further upriver to the site of Fort Sully to assist with the construction of this new post. Four days after their arrival, Gurnsey was detailed to return to Fort Randall with his company commander and two other married soldiers to retrieve and return with their families. The men spent the next several months constructing log barracks, officers' quarters, and warehouses in preparation for another winter on the Dakota frontier.¹³

Sully's Second Northwest Indian Expedition, 1864

As the bloody Civil War closed its third year with no end in sight, President Lincoln offered a thirty-day furlough to encourage veteran soldiers to reenlist, including those scattered across the western territories. At Fort Sully, Private Gurnsey and the majority of Company M signed their reenlistment papers and looked forward to soon



Top photo: "Head Chiefs of Gros Ventres, Sioux, Mandans, Crees, etc. Picture from Dr. A. W. Sully, son of Gen. Alfred Sully." Photo by Private Byron H. Gurnsey near Fort Berthold, August 1865. SHSND SA 00004-00006

Bottom photo: "Dirt Lodges at Fort Berthold." By Private Byron H. Gurnsey, August 1865. *Alfred Sully Papers, Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University*

visiting friends and family again. On March 17, after constructing a number of wooden flatboats, the veteran soldiers floated downriver to Sioux City. Gurnsey spent his thirty-day furlough moving his family to Davenport, Iowa, for the summer.¹⁴

As Sully prepared for his second campaign in Dakota Territory, Gurnsey's company was ordered to join this expedition. On the outskirts of Sioux City, Captain Pattee's battalion was joined by two additional companies of the Seventh Iowa Volunteer Cavalry, and they were all issued horses and saddles for the first time. The men also exchanged their infantry muskets for new revolvers and Belgian rifles. On May 30, 1864, the column of newly mounted Seventh Iowa rode out from Sioux City and once more began their ascent up the Missouri River.

Troops assigned to Sully's second Northwest Indian Expedition assembled near the mouth of the Cannonball River, about 150 miles above Fort Sully, where the general had directed the establishment of a new military post named Fort Rice. As four companies of the Thirtieth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry set to work constructing the log buildings, Sully's expedition was officially organized and they departed on July 19, angling northwest across the Dakota prairie. Gurnsey was presumably with his company as they repeatedly engaged in extended skirmishes, after which the spoils were destroyed in order to reduce the survivors' winter food stores and housing.¹⁵

Sully's troops returned to Fort Rice on September 8, 1864, where the expedition was officially disbanded. Pattee's battalion of the Seventh Iowa Volunteer Cavalry was ordered back downriver to Sioux City for the winter, where their horses could be more economically fed. Gurnsey was assigned as a clerk in the adjutant's office, and he rented a house in town for his family. After spending three winters at remote garrisons in Dakota Territory, their assignment to Sioux City for the winter was no doubt a welcome respite for the soldiers of Company M.¹⁶

An Emerging Photographer

Historical records suggest that up to this time, Gurnsey lacked any experience with photography. His wife, Ida, later recalled that her husband had entered the army as a carpenter but had emerged at the end of the war as a photographer. This transformation probably occurred during their eight-month stay in Sioux City in the winter of 1864–65. Typically, individuals learned these technical skills by apprenticing with an experienced photographer, often paying for this practical education. The most active photographer in Sioux City at this time was Charles L. Hamilton. Having fled the sectional violence of northern Missouri early in the Civil War, Hamilton had opened a studio on Pearl Street by November 1863 where he was offering "Photographs, Ambrotypes, Ferrotypes, and Melaineotypes,

equal to any Gallery in Iowa, and as cheap as can be had on the Missouri Slope." Two of his brothers—James and Grant—had worked with him for a brief period, but by mid-1864, James had moved downriver to Omaha where he opened his own studio. Charles Hamilton may have needed an assistant in his Sioux City gallery. Knowing that the war would be over at some point and that he would need to find a way to support his growing family, Gurnsey may have used his free time during the winter of 1864–65 to train as a photographer under the tutelage of C. L. Hamilton.¹⁷

In the spring of 1865, the Seventh Iowa Volunteer Cavalry was assigned as part of General Sully's third and final expedition. The general's original plan was to move west to the Black Hills where reports claimed large numbers of Lakota and Santee were gathering. While an army mapping expedition led by First Lieutenant G. K. Warren had passed through the southern edge of the Black Hills eight years earlier, this region still remained poorly known to most potential settlers, despite rumors of its potential mineral wealth. As his company prepared to participate in the expedition, Gurnsey must have recognized the rare opportunity and potential financial benefit of bringing back the first negatives of the Black Hills region. Having worked in the regimental headquarters, Gurnsey would have been known to the senior staff, and no doubt Sully's own artistic interests made him more accommodating to the proposal. In whatever manner the project was organized, Gurnsey was apparently allowed to bring a camera with him on Sully's final expedition.¹⁸

The expedition's itinerary however suddenly changed as Sully received new intelligence that large numbers of Native Americans were reportedly congregating near Devils Lake, probably for their seasonal buffalo hunt. Such rumors created alarm among the border communities in Minnesota and northern Dakota Territory, whose white residents quickly called for military protection. The general promptly altered his plan, abandoning his proposed Black Hills focus and instead ordering the column back up the Missouri River to Fort Rice, where the expedition would be formally organized. The battalion of Seventh Iowa Cavalry, including Company M, departed Sioux City on June 8 with Gurnsey assigned to the guard detail for the slower supply train, with his camera, chemicals, and equipment probably packed in one of the wagons. The battalion arrived at Fort Rice on July 13, 1865, where they remained for the next ten days. An unattributed photograph showing the interior of Fort Rice (pages 4–5) may be one of Gurnsey's first images from the 1865 expedition.¹⁹

Sully's third Northwest Indian Expedition departed Fort Rice on July 23 and headed north toward Devils Lake. While no signs of the reported Dakota bands could be found, they did encounter a recent trail left by horses and carts belonging to a large Métis hunting party, potentially the source of the



Spotted Tail, the Noted Indian Chief, and his Party.

CHAS. GURNEY, Interpreter.

FAST BEAR, Warrior.

SPOTTED TAIL, Head Chief.

Capt. D. C. POOLE, U. S. A.

SWIFT BEAR, Chief.

YELLOW HAIR, Warrior.

Photographed by Gurnsey & Illingworth, Sioux City, Iowa.

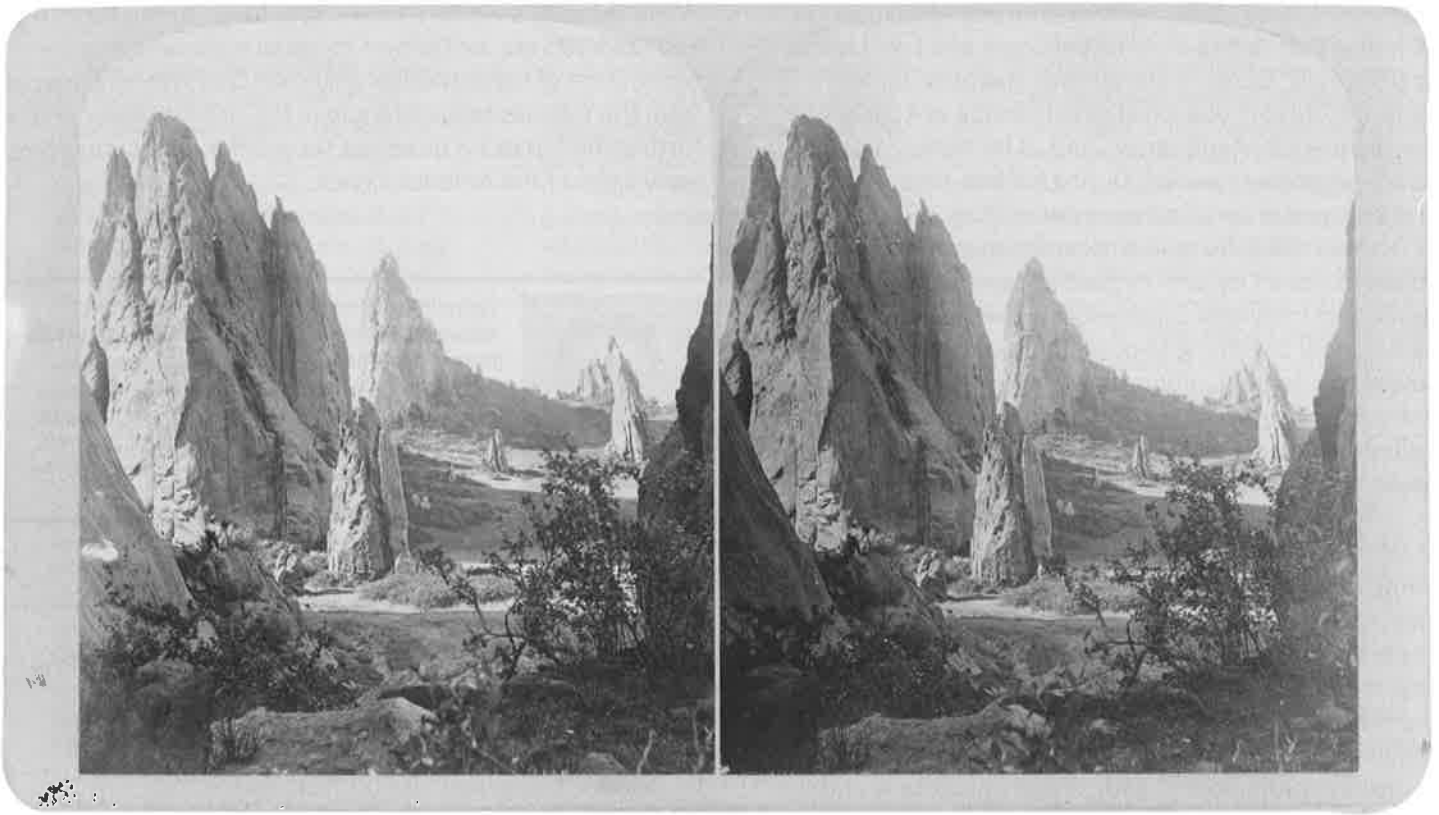
COPYRIGHT APPLIED FOR.

As a civilian photographer in Sioux City, Gurnsey had several opportunities to photograph Lakota delegations en route to or returning from meeting with the president in Washington, DC. In 1870, the *Sioux City Journal* noted the arrival of the Brulé delegation led by Spotted Tail: "Gurnsey & Illingworth, photographers on Third Street, last Saturday procured some very fine negatives of Spotted Tail and his party" (*Sioux City Journal*, June 22, 1870). © The Trustees of the British Museum

frantic reports by settlers. The descendants of fur trader fathers and their Ojibwe or Plains Cree wives, the Métis had coalesced by the early nineteenth century into distinct communities, speaking the trading language of mixed French and Cree that had become the common language of the northern plains fur trade. Each summer, large parties of Métis families headed south across the US border from the Red River to hunt buffalo, their economy built around

providing meat to the Hudson Bay Fur Company as well as trading hides for the commercial goods that they required. A few Métis became successful independent traders on their own.²⁰

In the aftermath of the US-Dakota War in Minnesota, some army officers expressed concern that Métis traders were providing the Indian refugees access to contraband such



Gurnsey produced and sold several series of stereoscopic images depicting the scenery of the Colorado region during the 1870s, including a number of views of the famed Garden of the Gods, the dramatic red sandstone formations located near Colorado Springs. The photographer died in Colorado Springs in November 1880. *Library of Congress 3c04999u*

as alcohol, weapons, gunpowder, and lead. One officer even accused the Métis of inciting the Dakota in order to stimulate their business. Sully may not have believed such accusations, but he did consider the traders to be “a great nuisance,” describing them as “a great obstacle to any permanent settlement of difficulties in this section of country.” He endorsed the reports of several officers stationed on the Upper Missouri during the winter of 1864–65 that resulted in a presidential proclamation for the arrest of such cross-border traders.²¹

Sully’s column found the main Métis encampment on the banks of the Sheyenne River on July 28. According to the expedition’s surgeon, Dr. George Herrick, the party numbered about two thousand people in all, with an accompanying Catholic priest as well as a traveling French count along for the hunt. The Métis families were busy butchering buffalo, slicing the meat into thin slices to be smoked on improvised racks, as well as tanning the robes for later trade. Sully ordered a search of the camp but no illegal trade goods were found. As the army column went into camp nearby, Gurnsey unpacked his camera and produced at least one surviving image of the Métis carts encircled in a corral (page 5).

Sully’s column continued on to Devils Lake, but finding no evidence of the reported Native villages in the vicinity, they soon turned to the southwest and followed the

Mouse River down to the Missouri River. Dressed in their greatcoats and gloves as the weather became rainy and cold, the soldiers then turned south until they reached Fort Berthold on August 8. “We have thus marched a distance of two hundred and seventy-five miles without seeing a hostile Indian,” wrote the column’s surgeon, Dr. George Herrick, “though every means in the power of the General commanding has been used to find their camp.”²²

For the next two weeks, as Sully’s expedition rested in scattered camps near Fort Berthold, Gurnsey again unpacked his camera and produced a number of negatives. In addition to views of the trading post itself, he turned his camera toward the earthlodge village and also captured views of the various army encampments (pages 8–12). Gurnsey’s remarkable images are the earliest surviving photographs of Fort Berthold, predating later stops by other photographers such as William H. Illingworth, Stanley J. Morrow, Orlando S. Goff, and F. Jay Haynes.

Gurnsey as Commercial Photographer

Sully’s final expedition was disbanded after its arrival at Fort Sully on September 13. Despite the end of the Civil War, many volunteer units serving in the West were retained in service until they could be relieved by the regular army. For the winter of 1865–66, Sully was ordered to establish a line of forts to protect the settlements in southern Dakota Territory and northern Iowa. Gurnsey’s

Company M was scattered to several points that winter, including Fort James on Firesteel Creek and Fort Dakota at Sioux Falls. Gurnsey himself was stationed back in Sioux City as part of a small detail serving as couriers for the regimental headquarters and as teamsters moving forage whenever needed. During his free time, Gurnsey also engaged in some commercial photographic work. In October 1865, he paid a tax assessment to operate a studio in Sioux City, and he paid to have blank cardstock printed with his new commercial address, evidence that he was now beginning to operate his own business. Several photograph albums have survived filled with individual portraits of soldiers from the Seventh Iowa Volunteer Cavalry, some of which bear the printed backmark of B. H. Gurnsey.²³

In December 1865, Gurnsey and several other men from Company M were detailed as teamsters to drive freight wagons filled with sacks of grain from Sioux City upriver to Fort Randall. Unfortunately, the detail was caught in a severe blizzard on the open plains. Inadequately prepared, the men slept in the wagons on top of the grain sacks with nothing more than the canvas covers to protect them. Gurnsey returned home with severe pneumonia and spent the next several months convalescing, though he never fully recovered and suffered breathing issues for the remainder of his life.²⁴

The Seventh Iowa Cavalry was finally mustered out of federal service in June 1866. Following his discharge, Gurnsey established a permanent photographic studio on Third Street in Sioux City, and he continued to travel throughout the region producing photographs. He made a trip to Fort Dakota to photograph the army's buildings, partnered with William H. Illingworth to produce a series of stereoviews of Sioux Falls, and traveled to the Winnebago Agency, where he produced Native portraits and outdoor views. In 1870, he photographed several of the Lakota delegations passing through Sioux City on their way to or return from Washington, DC, to meet with the president.²⁵

In June 1870, Gurnsey's studio was badly damaged in a fire. While he temporarily reopened in a nearby building, Gurnsey decided to follow the advice of his doctor and move to a drier climate. Six months later, he sold his studio equipment and most of his glass plate negatives to James H. Hamilton, brother of Gurnsey's presumed mentor, and he headed west with his family to Pueblo, Colorado. He later relocated in Colorado Springs. Through the 1870s, Gurnsey continued to operate his portrait studio as well as travel throughout the region to photograph the dramatic scenery. He is perhaps best known for his popular series of stereoscopic views of the Rocky Mountains, including striking images of Pike's Peak and Garden of the Gods. Byron H. Gurnsey died in Colorado Springs on November 18, 1880.²⁶

While Gurnsey's western views from Iowa, Nebraska, and Colorado are well known to visual historians, the recognition of his previously unknown Civil War-era images from the Dakotas helps fill a gap in this artist's career and further reinforces his deserved recognition as an important early artist of the American West.



Ephriam D. Dickson III is deputy chief of field museums for the US Army Center of Military History based at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He is especially interested in the history of the frontier army, Lakota political history, and early photography in the American West. He is the author of a number of articles on these topics as well as the book *The Sitting Bull Surrender Census* (2010).

Private Byron H. Gurnsey's photographic documentation of portions of General Sully's Northwest Indian Expedition of 1865 offers a view of a military campaign from one perspective. Historic places such as Fort Rice, Fort Buford, Killdeer Mountain, and Whitestone Hill are protected as state historic sites. As such they are operated by the State Historical Society of North Dakota, which is committed to working with descendants of people involved in the stories of these significant places. The Society strives to share viewpoints from multiple perspectives, helping visitors recognize the complexity and density of our shared stories.

*Erik Holland, curator of education
State Historical Society of North Dakota*

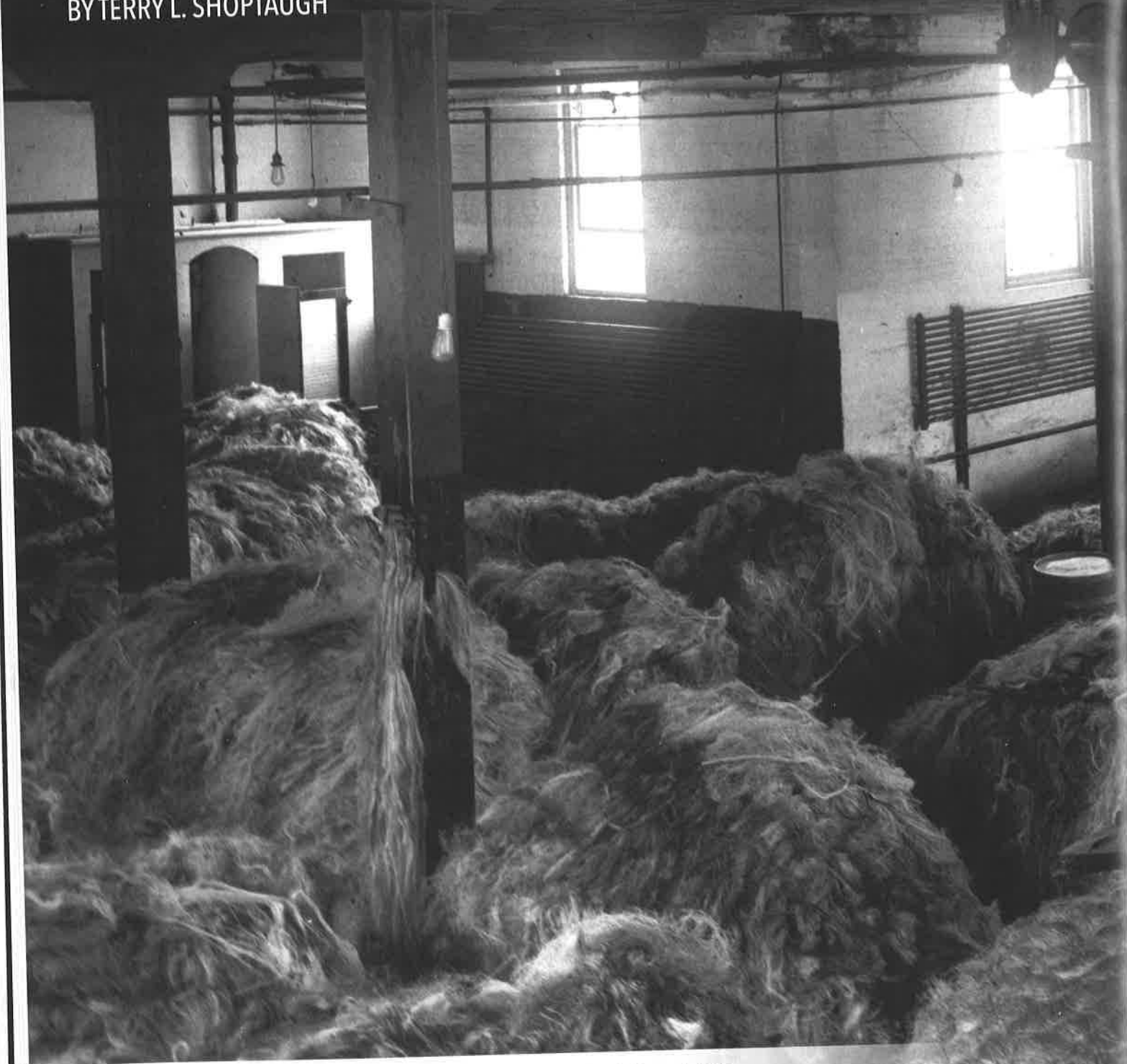
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Angry Harvest

A. C. Townley's Controversial Florida Sisal Venture

BY TERRY L. SHOPTAUGH



A view of the machinery used to make twine at the North Dakota State Penitentiary in Bismarck, 1902. Inmates of the State Penitentiary made binder twine from sisal imported from Mexico. Shareholders in the US Sisal Trust hoped to profit by using Florida-grown sisal as a substitute. SHSND SA E0239-00001



By 1915, anger among the nation's farmers was widespread. It stemmed from the fact that, while the nation's economists were anticipating record-making crops, many of the farmers who produced the foods were woefully underpaid for their efforts. As one farmer noted in a letter to the *Atlantic Monthly*, anyone being paid a "regular wage" was better off than farmers, because it was "uncertain whether the farmer will be paid." Due to weather and market changes, a farmer "must dare to lose at every turn."¹

In the years following this farmer's remarks a new agrarian movement arose in the Great Plains, built on the anger of thousands of farmers, and briefly became a national force in agricultural politics. Within five years, this movement began to fade as suddenly as it had sprung up. The decline was also fed by anger, this time within the movement. Ironically, much of the trouble arose from a crop that existed nowhere on the Great Plains—the sisal plant, a highly valued source of binder twine that grew well in warm, moist conditions.

Early in 1915, North Dakota farm leaders gathered in Bismarck to confront state legislators who had promised for years to build a state grain elevator and mill. But each year, the legislative bill drafted for this purpose was tabled on budget grounds. Farmers were told again in 1915 that the construction of the grain elevator was too expensive. Some farmers griped, and one legislator ostensibly said other issues were more vital, and told the farmers to go home and "slop your hogs." Angry farmers used the story to organize a protest group and pledged to vote at the next election *only* for active farmer-candidates who supported the grain elevator bill.²

Dubbed the "Nonpartisan League," this movement was fanned by a dynamic reformer named Arthur C. Townley. Townley had flirted with



Arthur C. Townley (1880–1959), 1916. Townley conceived the idea of the Nonpartisan League (NPL) with the help of friends he made during his days farming near Beach, North Dakota. The NPL elected him president in 1915, and the sisal scheme was one of the activities leading to his resignation in 1922. SHSND SA B0919-00001

socialism following the failure of his own farm in 1912, but farmers in the movement tended to ignore that part of his life. One historian has noted that labor groups and agrarian groups had long been criticized for "socialist influence," but the impact was minimal. At most socialist literature

helped "agrarians to think more broadly about political economy."³

Townley's success came mostly from his ability to stoke the anger of the farmers. He told one group at a League rally that if a farmer put a lawyer, a politician, and a railroad official in a barrel and pushed them downhill, "an s.o.b. will always end up on top."⁴

Townley was seemingly tireless. The new Nonpartisan League (NPL) members made him their president. He proved to be a capable political strategist and a wizard at organizing rallies. Membership grew steadily through 1915, in North Dakota as well as in other states such as Montana and Minnesota. When League-endorsed candidates won enough seats in the North Dakota legislature in 1916 to push through tax relief, the League became the subject of national press attention. In the 1918 elections, League candidates won both the governorship and a majority in the state House. They used the power to enact new farm programs. These included the long-awaited grain elevator, a state bank, rural credit programs, and electoral changes that permitted voters to approve or reject new laws.



A. C. Townley addressing a Nonpartisan League meeting in Glencoe, Minnesota, 1916. Townley was skillful at organizing farmers to demand new legislation to help agriculture. An accomplished speaker, he stirred crowds by denouncing bankers, lawmakers, and "s.o.b.s who cheated the people." SHSND SA B0924-00001

New League chapters sprouted in many of the Plains states, with tens of thousands of farmers enrolled. As a result, there was speculation that the League's voting power could put Townley into a US Senate seat, or even make him a candidate for president. But the NPL had a weakness: its funding rested on the dues of farmers who joined the movement. That was an unstable source. Some farmers joined, then quit after a new success, satisfied that they now had the security they needed. This led Townley to look for new revenue sources. In 1922, after a series of mistakes, Townley would be forced out of his leadership of the League. Sisal played a major part in his downfall.

A Tempting Investment

From the available evidence, it was not until the last months of 1918 that Townley and other League notables showed any interest in making

Townley's success came mostly from his ability to stoke the anger of the farmers.

investments in sisal. An ideal fiber for binding twine, sisal was a profitable crop in Latin America, East Asia, and southern Africa. Taken together, these places provided sisal for much of the world.⁵

Farmers in Louisiana and Florida had considered trying to grow sisal, but it required about seven years of cultivation before the leaves had the tensile strength to be used. Only those who could afford the time could benefit from the investment in sisal, and International Harvester had secured a reasonable price from Mexican growers. Alternative fibers, like manila from Hawaii, showed great promise. But for now sisal twine dominated the American market.⁶

When Europe's descent into war in 1914 boosted the prices of food worldwide, American farmers rushed to expand their crops. Expenses for tilling and harvesting jumped too, including the cost of twine. Twine made from Mexican sisal had sold for about six cents a pound, but the war drove sisal prices up to twenty cents. US-Mexico negotiations in 1916 temporarily stabilized the price at just over sixteen cents, and farmers in Southern states experimented with planting sisal to get in on the profits.⁷

As early as the 1890s, the United States Department of Agriculture published reports noting that "true sisal hemp plant [grew wild in] the southern portion of Florida." By late 1917, Florida farmers cultivated sisal, and Florida newspapers advertised how "enterprising men" could cultivate sisal for "reasonable" profit.⁸ Based on such information, Townley invested League money in sisal.

These ads drew some NPL leaders to show interest in sisal. The exact sequence of events is unclear, but in late 1918, North Dakota newspapers announced that a new company, the United States Sisal Trust, had been formed to cultivate sisal in Florida. Interested investors could contact the Trust for shares in the venture. Nothing was said about a relationship between the US Sisal Trust and the Nonpartisan League, but many of the Trust's board members were League notables. James R. Waters, a League member and the president of the newly created Bank of North Dakota, was president of the Trust. Alex Stern, mayor of Fargo, and H. J. Hagen, president of the Scandinavian-American Bank in Fargo, were also officers. Presidents and head cashiers of local banks owned shares. The League itself had controlling shares and deposited much of its revenue in the Scandinavian-American Bank. It was this bank that furnished the loans to buy the land in Florida for planting sisal.⁹



This 1915 cartoon was one of the earliest editorial drawings to appear in the *Nonpartisan Leader* weekly newspaper. Depicting two standard caricatures of wealth and "politics as usual," the panel reminded readers that farmers had been asking the North Dakota legislature for a state-operated grain elevator since 1912. During the 1914 elections, several legislators, and the governor, had said they would support that request, but a year later no action had been taken to fulfill those promises. In forming the League in 1915, thousands of farmers in the state sought to get the aid they wanted through a grassroots movement that grew rapidly across the state. Courtesy Nonpartisan Leader Collection, Minnesota State University Moorhead

In the 1940s, historian Robert Morlan, while researching his book on the League, interviewed Townley. Morlan asked Townley how League members came to form the Sisal Trust. Townley said "sometime in 1918" he met a man in Fargo who pitched a plan to create "a guaranteed supply" of Florida sisal for Plains farmers. Townley liked the idea of sisal production but doubted the wisdom of putting NPL funds into the plan. He said he found out later that "other Leaguers" got into the Trust. But Townley misled Morlan.¹⁰

Newspapers around the state mentioned the Sisal Trust periodically, but it was not until 1920 that detailed information about the Trust came to light. This was after opponents of the League won a majority of seats in North Dakota's House of Representatives and ordered an audit of the state government's use of funds. That audit would find no evidence of illegal use of taxpayers' money by the Sisal Trust, but what they did find raised ethical questions about League leaders, including Townley.

Wartime demand for wheat in 1918 drove farmers to plant more acres, and sisal became a tempting investment.

It was impossible to grow sisal on the Plains. But planting sisal might have helped solve a money problem for the League. NPL revenue depended mostly on the eight-dollar annual membership dues, which included a subscription to the *Nonpartisan Leader* and discounts from League-friendly merchants. Many small farmers had trouble paying eight dollars annually. Personal IOUs were sent in frequently. The League had some two million dollars in IOUs or postdated checks

Wartime demand for wheat in 1918 drove farmers to plant more acres, and sisal became a tempting investment.

by 1919. Several banks in the state refused to loan money to the League with IOUs as collateral, so League leaders bought major shares in small banks and deposited the IOUs as "bank assets." League control of the Scandinavian-American Bank allowed the NPL to use these as collateral for loans from the bank.¹¹

Such loans were useful for campaign costs and operating expenses, but there was an ongoing cycle of new members joining while others

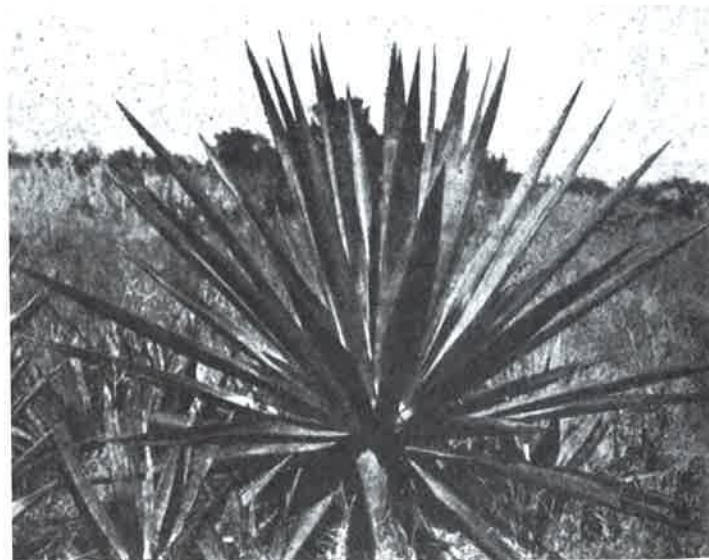
dropped their memberships. The *Nonpartisan Leader* frequently urged readers to renew membership because it "repaid" the farmer with "higher prices."¹²

Leaguers tried a variety of money-making expedients. Using their legislative majority in North Dakota, they selected "official newspapers" and paid them for publishing new state laws. State governments had done this for decades. Chosen papers usually carried ads for League products. In another scheme, League-endorsed products were sold at members-only discount stores run by League members. The total monies gained through these expedients were not impressive, however, and other merchants resented the competition. Opponents of the NPL claimed that "Townley's gang" intended to demolish the "whole state's present commercial fabric."¹³

Townley's effort to expand the League in other states, especially Minnesota, cost money. Some of his colleagues felt too much of the treasury's funds were used for this. Townley had moved the League's main headquarters to Minnesota after the 1916 election victory. He also bought



Sisal plants in the nursery at the Agricultural Experiment Station, Mayaguez, Porto [Puerto] Rico. Yearbook of Agriculture, 1918, p. 364, Plate LI, fig. 1



It required some seven years to nurture a sisal plant to maturity and harvest decent fiber for twine. Those who invested in the League-endorsed Sisal Trust seemed not to understand this when they bought undeveloped land in Florida for planting sisal. Angry recriminations among the investors were the unsurprising result. Yearbook of Agriculture, 1918, p. 364, Plate LI, fig. 2

a house for himself there. He spent large sums in failing efforts to win a majority in the Minnesota legislature, and League officers in Montana, South Dakota, and elsewhere criticized him for it. At the NPL annual convention in 1919, Townley placated state leaders by yielding control of their local dues. This further reduced the funds he had at his disposal.¹⁴

Thus, money may have induced Townley to meet the man from Florida. Florida newspapers, illustrated with lavish photos of sisal fields, were used by traveling promoters. Whatever occurred, the US Sisal Trust announced its plans in late 1918. Trust members who went to Florida as investors were among Townley's oldest friends. First and foremost of these was Job Brinton. Before the League existed, Brinton had been the mayor of Beach, North Dakota, where Townley had his flax farm. Farmers near Beach, along the border with Montana, frequently were paid less for lower-quality wheat. They were among the first to hear Townley's florid and angry speeches against grain agents and bankers,



Lynn J. Frazier (1874–1947), 1916. Frazier was a farmer from Hoople when the Nonpartisan League chose him to run for governor in 1916. He served as governor from 1917–1921, when he was removed from office by recall. Frazier successfully ran for the US Senate and served from 1923–1940. LC-USZ62-71568

and Brinton had been one of his first League recruiters.

Townley benefitted from Brinton's political experience, and Brinton envied Townley's charisma. After the

League had influence in the state legislature, Brinton's status grew. He became a shareholder in the League-endorsed stores and became head of the office that coordinated the official state newspapers. Brinton was well paid in these posts. He hoped to rise even higher, perhaps to the US Senate.¹⁵

Testifying at the 1921 audit committee that investigated possible misuse of state funds, Brinton was vague about how and why he went to Florida to buy land suitable for sisal growing in 1918. Pointing out that the Sisal Trust was a stock company of private investors, he simply said he bought land for the Trust and hired workers to get sisal planted.¹⁶

In a brief account of the Florida venture in his 1931 memoir, *Wheat and Politics*, Brinton claimed the sisal investments were "a personal Townley activity." Townley, he wrote, "invested thousands of dollars" for shares in the Trust, paid for from membership "dues collected from the farmers." League members had been deceived. Brinton



Scandinavian-American Bank, Fargo, circa 1917. Enemies of Townley charged him with using Nonpartisan League funds deposited in the Scandinavian-American Bank to buy shares in a business trust to grow and market sisal in Florida. *Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo*

United States Sisal Trust

BEN SHEPARD
CLERK OF DISTRICT COURT
DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

MIAMI, FLORIDA

STATE OF FLORIDA,
COUNTY OF DADE.

I, BEN SHEPARD, Clerk of the District Court in and for Dade County, State of Florida, do hereby certify that the UNITED STATES SISAL TRUST is the record owner of all of Tract Fifty-eight (58) South of Range thirty-six (36) East, excepting Section Sixteen (16) which is termed as a School Section, said land aggregating 28,400 acres. Deed to said land was filed by the said Company on May first 1919, and duly recorded in Deed Book 117 at page 202. I further certify that this gives the said UNITED STATES SISAL TRUST clear title to this land with the exception of a mortgage in the sum of \$28,000.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and the official seal of the Clerk of the District Court, Dade County, State of Florida, this 15th day of May A. D. 1919.

Ben Shepard
CLERK OF DISTRICT COURT IN
AND FOR DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA.

This land is situated southwest of Miami, Florida, three and one-half miles west of the Dixie Highway. This tract is being connected with this National highway, giving the company a hard-surfaced truck highway direct to railroad station, and to Miami, the largest commercial city in Southern Florida.



THE STATE OF FLORIDA

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE &
TALLAHASSEE

December 28, 1918.

Mr. J. P. Audon
Chevrolet Corporation,
Miami, Florida.

Dear Sir:

The clippings and photos were duly received and we thank you for them. It is unnecessary for us to say that wherever and whenever possible, this Department will lend whatever assistance it can for the furtherance of a worthwhile project like this.

In the opinion of the writer, all of the higher lands in lower Dade, Lee, and North Monroe Counties (on the mainland) will produce the sisal hemp plant to perfection. As an instance of the truth of this assertion, growers of sisal hemp from the Bahamas and Yucatan once came a year to visit Dade County and get clips of the plant for re-establishing broken places on the lands in the same position. This instance goes to show the superiority of the plants grown in Dade County over the native plants grown in Central America and the Bahamas.

Thanking you for the photos and clippings, and with best regards, I am

Wm. M. McRae
Commissioner of Agriculture

Sisal has grown in this section of Florida since 1826, but has never been developed on a commercial scale. A greater part of the world's supply comes from Yucatan, Cuba and the Bahamas. In eight months last year \$35,000,000 worth of sisal was imported into the United States. J. P. Audon to whom the above letter was written is vice president of our company.

To Whom It May Concern

THIS STATEMENT is being made by us, through the public press, to set at rest rumors, reports and printed articles about this enterprise which are false, untrue and misleading. We publish this announcement so that the public may know that the UNITED STATES SISAL TRUST is a company organized to develop and grow sisal in the state of Florida for commercial purposes. Sisal is used to make rope, twine and other cordage products.

Sisal is one of the most needed and necessary products used by the American farmer—and by American industry for rope, cable and other purposes. 143,000 tons (286,000,000 pounds) were imported into the United States in one year. It is needless to say that it is a money-making crop. The price of twine answers any question on that subject. Sisal is shipped to all parts of the world. It is a world-needed crop.

The sisal plant has grown in Florida for nearly 100 years. This company proposes to develop it commercially, as a money-making, business enterprise. We have 22,400 acres of land in the sisal district of Florida for plantation purposes; we have a developed sisal nursery containing 750,000 plants; we have expended in development, outside of land investment, in the past six months over \$75,000.00 in cash—in land clearing, plant gathering, road building, and for equipment and machinery. We have assets of over \$400,000.00 in land and physical property.

The United States Sisal Trust is not organized for the purpose of selling stock. We are organized to develop, grow and market sisal, and the only stock that will be sold will be to secure sufficient capital to properly carry on the plantation development. We are not a Nonpartisan League enterprise, nor are we endorsed by that or any other political or farmers organization. We are a business organization, organized for business purposes, backed and managed by men of Florida (where sisal grows) and bankers and business men of the Northwest (where sisal and twine is used).

This announcement is not published for the purpose of encouraging the public to invest their money with us. It is published for the sole purpose of setting at rest false reports that have been circulated because one of our officers is connected with the North Dakota administration and is at the head of a state institution—which has no connection with this company in any way. A partial list of our shareholders, who have financed this company, is given on this page. This list speaks for itself.

United States Sisal Trust

BY J. R. WATERS, PRESIDENT.

T. P. HARVEY, SECRETARY.

Officers and Prominent Shareholders of the UNITED STATES SISAL TRUST

OFFICERS

J. R. WATERS—President United States Sisal Trust, Bismarck, N. D.
J. P. AUDON—Vice President United States Sisal Trust, Bismarck, N. D.
T. P. HARVEY—Secretary United States Sisal Trust, Bismarck, N. D.
J. R. WATERS—President United States Sisal Trust, Bismarck, N. D.
J. P. AUDON—Vice President United States Sisal Trust, Bismarck, N. D.
T. P. HARVEY—Secretary United States Sisal Trust, Bismarck, N. D.

SHAREHOLDERS

C. B. LITTLE—President First National Bank, Bismarck, N. D.
HAROLD HOLVAD—Cashier First National Bank, Bismarck, N. D.
A. L. E. STUBBS—Manager First N. D. Bank, Bismarck, N. D.
J. R. WATERS—President United States Sisal Trust, Bismarck, N. D.
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T. P. HARVEY—Secretary United States Sisal Trust, Bismarck, N. D.



This picture was taken last November and shows a small section of our sisal plant nursery containing 750,000 two-year-old plants, sufficient to establish a 1,000 acre plantation—for which land is now being prepared to receive these plants. The other picture on this page shows the same plants six months later.

GENERAL OFFICES

Minneapolis,
Minn.

PLANTATION
OFFICE
MIAMI,
Florida



Note the development and healthy appearance of these plants. This picture was taken in April, and when compared with the other picture, shows the rapid growth of the plants from November to April. This photograph was taken when the property was inspected last April by Mr. Waters who is shown in the picture.

claimed he used his own money for his shares. Townley later said that no League money ever went into the sisal venture. The truth will probably never be known.¹⁷

Another Townley intimate who became involved in the sisal scheme was James Waters, the first director of the Bank of North Dakota, established in July 1919 by the votes of League representatives. The bank's initial capitalization of two million dollars was to be used for the State Mill and Elevator and other League programs.

Waters, like Brinton, was an associate from Beach. He started his career as a real estate speculator. Arriving in Beach in 1909 or 1910, he posted advertisements in the *Golden Valley Chronicle* that he would lend money to families seeking to buy homes in the town, promising to work out "decent monthly payments." As his success grew he became head of the Beach Commercial Club and was said to have a talent for knowing which man's "personal note" was good and whose notes were unreliable. Waters likely met Brinton at the Commercial Club. Waters joined Townley when the League began to blossom. Once the League took power, Waters became a state auditor, then was named by Governor Frazier as head of the Bank of North Dakota. Even the *Bismarck Tribune*, no friend of the League, thought Waters could ably run "what promises to become the north-west's largest financial institution."¹⁸

Sometime in 1918 Waters agreed to be the president of the Sisal Trust, keeping his government post at the Bank of North Dakota. In early 1920, Waters went south for a few weeks to help Brinton find workers for cultivating the Trust's land. What funds they may have spent overall for labor is unknown. Both shuttled back and forth between Florida and North Dakota for at least a year. Both later said they had been promised generous pay for taking on the job in Florida.



Governor Lynn J. Frazier (seated, left) and North Dakota agency heads, Bismarck, 1919. As governor during the height of the Nonpartisan League, Frazier was able to reach agreements with both Republicans and the state's Democratic legislators. SHSND SA C3497-00001

The Florida Gamble

Growing sisal is a special challenge, however capable a farmer might be. A sisal plant requires several years of care before the fibers in the leaves are mature enough to be used for twine. A young plant emerges from pod-like bulbils, small secondary bulbs, and flowers only once. Sisal has to be tended carefully. As explained in a pamphlet available in 1919, newly plucked bulbils "are tended in a hothouse for six months," then transplanted to a field. "One-year-old plants will, with proper treatment, be 18 inches high," and will be tended four more years. But "bulbs planted [in a plot] 12 by 18 or 24 inches, and left in the nursery for a longer period [up to two years], will be stronger and furnish mature leaves earlier," that is, better twine. Most growing was hand work. The best fiber came from plants seven to eleven years old. At least thirty-five of the leaves had to be retained to get bulbils for a new plant.¹⁹

Neither Waters nor Brinton could boast of expertise in sisal cultivation.

The main Trust lands were in Dade County, west and south of Miami. Whoever bought the land must have noticed there was no good road to a rail line. If the buyer was in Florida during winter, the dry climate may have deceived him. In mid-summer much of the ground was frequently waterlogged. Florida soil was not as rich as that on the Plains. A Florida agronomist noted in 1927 that on "average [the] soil fertility of Florida would rank below almost all other states." No papers of the Trust have come to light, so the purchase process is unknown.²⁰

Certainly basic problems emerged when Brinton and Waters sent the Sisal Trust's chief secretary, T. P. Harvey, to Florida to inspect the Florida land, about 22,000 acres in all. Harvey too was a League member. He dealt in Florida with a man he called "Capt. J." This was James Jaudon, a Florida land speculator and a Trust stockholder. Jaudon understood sisal better than the North Dakotans. He knew that five-year-old plants could yield a lower-grade fiber that could give the investors an early return.²¹



A Florida sisal hemp plant. *Popular Science Monthly*, Volume 54, November 1898, p. 9

But Harvey found much to worry him in Florida. The land required more drainage before it was suitable for transplanting. A good road had yet to be constructed. Workers were hard to recruit. A housing boom drew workers away from field work as Dade County's population skyrocketed. The price of home lots in Miami tripled. One historian noted that many bought land "without even seeing it." Harvey had to offer higher wages to his workers.²²

The Trust had chartered their company in the expectation that the Great War would last into 1920, keeping wheat prices high and sisal in great demand. But German resistance began to falter in the last weeks of August 1918. The collapse of the German army in October 1918 was a surprise. Commodity markets expected demand for American grain would continue, but other investors had put money into new sisal planting in Central America and the Far East. Ventures in Louisiana and Florida began, as well as in the Philippines and Puerto Rico. The North Dakotans had thought they would have time to make the Florida fields pay. Now it was a bigger gamble.²³

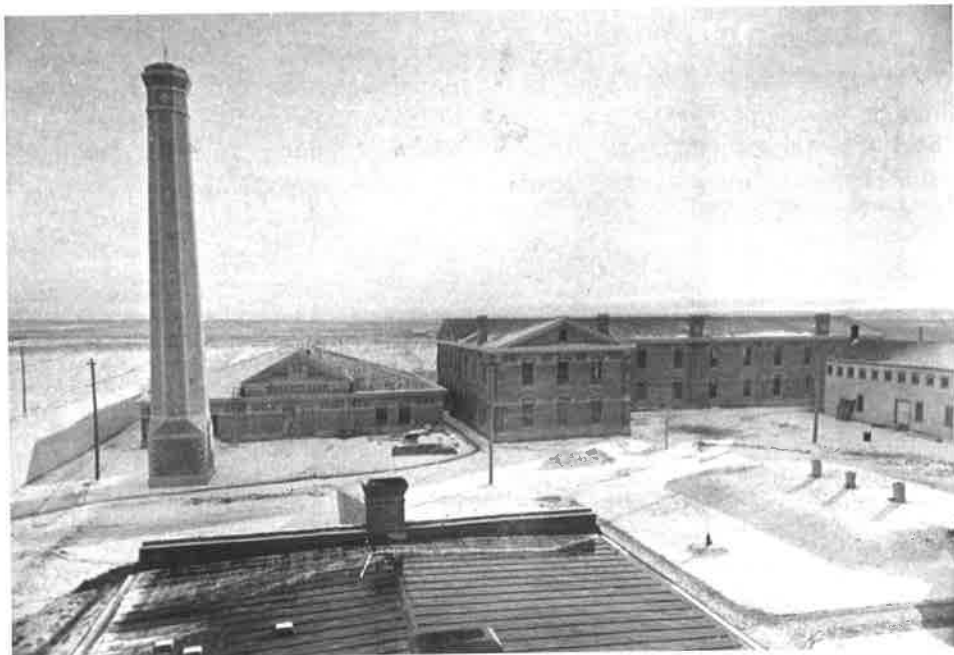
Harvey wrote to Brinton expressing deep concern. Almost nothing had been done to lay out a hard gravel road, "the Captain" [Jaudon] seldom visited the site, and a local lawyer

hired to manage labor contracts was never around. "There is no one to look after that [road] contractor," Harvey wrote, "and I am satisfied he is not getting the very most from [money spent] either." He did not "understand how \$33,000 have gone" for so little progress. The workers loafed on the job, and supervisors did too. He thought Brinton should come see the situation himself.²⁴

Harvey's letter noted that the Trust had spent nearly \$150,000 in Florida thus far. It raises the question as to whether the Trust had sufficient money for the investment. In contrast to this single road of some thirty miles, Captain Jaudon, who had sold the Trust its land, was spending millions on roads. Jaudon was the president of the Chevelier Corporation, a real estate company with title to two hundred thousand acres of land in Monroe County, and thousands more acres in Collier and Lee Counties. Chevelier Corporation was building the Ta-miami Trail, a three-hundred-mile road in 1918, from Miami to the port town of Naples. The route cut through some of the heaviest parts of the Everglades. In addition to taking much of the available labor force in south Florida,

the resources of Chevelier suggest no one from the Trust had a firm knowledge of the land development situation in Florida, or who it was competing with.²⁵

Had the Trust engaged an expert in growing sisal? Did any Trust members understand the climate, the weather, available rail transport, or so many other topics a careful developer should know? Harvey's letters say nothing on these matters; his frustrated tones suggest he felt confused about the entire undertaking. In a second report Harvey again complained he was short on cash to pay workers. The problem was "leaving us [in Florida] without further credit." So Harvey returned north to try to seek loans from other North Dakota banks. This happened at the time the Scandinavian-American Bank in Fargo, controlled by the League, was being investigated for extending poorly secured loans. Significantly, Harvey's collateral for his task was a stack of farmers' IOUs to the League, and they seemed to be of little help. In a follow-up message to Brinton, Harvey confessed that "I am knowing none of these bankers up here [in western North Dakota] and this will prove somewhat of a handicap."²⁶



The interior courtyard area around the twine and cordage plant at the North Dakota State Penitentiary, Bismarck, 1902. The plant was constructed in 1899 and began operation in 1900. Fire destroyed the structure in 1970. The Century Code that established the plant was repealed in 1979. SHSND SA 11022-0074

By 1919, Brinton, Waters, and Harvey were clearly becoming unhappy about the funding they were receiving. From the letters it appeared to be a fraction of what they needed to get the field work completed and a good crop planted.

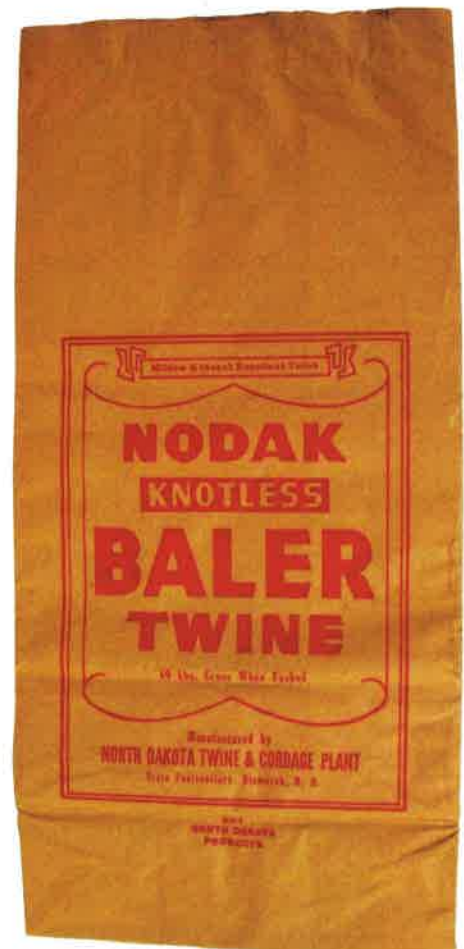
Prison Labor and Twine Production

The League could count on customers for sisal if it managed to grow a crop. Since 1900, the State Penitentiary in Bismarck had operated a plant that made twine. Several rural states had begun manufacturing binding twine since the 1880s. In these operations, convict labor could produce twine at about a third of the labor cost that was paid by companies like International Harvester. North Dakota's government maintained offices in Florida and Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula for buying raw sisal for twine production. One of the State Penitentiary wardens wrote in a 1902 report to the State Treasury, North Dakota's "consumers [of the penitentiary twine] have reaped no small benefit by being enabled

to buy their twine at materially lower prices."²⁷

Historian Sterling Evans examined records of North Dakota's Prison Board and found that the prison twine saved "farmers many hundreds of thousands of dollars" on twine. In 1914, farmers in the state paid three cents less per pound for their twine, saving a total statewide of about \$750,000 a year. Other states with penitentiary industries, including Minnesota, Montana, Kansas, and Oklahoma, provided similar savings to their farmers.²⁸

As the Great War continued, twine costs rose by more than four hundred percent. States with twine-making operations expanded their production. A Minnesota newspaper claimed their Stillwater penitentiary twine could become "the greatest revenue producing public institution in the world." Minnesota newspapers urged farmers to preorder twine before prices jumped again.²⁹



The twine plant at the North Dakota State Penitentiary initially produced twine for binders. As binders and threshing machines were replaced by swathers and combines, the methods of hay production changed. Stacking frames gave way to balers that produced rectangular bales, and eventually round bales. Co-ops, elevators, and farm supply stores stocked bags containing rolls of twine, ready for haying season. SHSND 2011.45.2



Salesman case, 1920–1929. Traveling salesmen blanketed the northern plains seeking a market for the twine produced by the state penitentiary. Like earlier salesmen carrying miniature stoves, or miniature binders, etc., the twine salesmen had cases with samples of their product. SHSND 1974.51.115

The Nonpartisan Leader

NATIONAL EDITION

FEBRUARY 3, 1919



In 1915, the newly formed Nonpartisan League (NPL), a farmer protest movement, spread across the state. The NPL controlled both houses of the sixteenth session of the North Dakota legislature that met in 1919. NDSU-PL00081

The penitentiary at Bismarck pushed to expand its own output, but, ironically, had shortage of convict labor. In late 1918, there were only 133 inmates in the Bismarck penitentiary, about half the prewar average of 250. The penitentiary offered to take possession of prisoners from the federal government and from other states but received only a few more workers.³⁰

Clearly, North Dakota had the facilities to make a profit on twine. And, since political forecasters in 1919 expected that the state government of Minnesota would likely fall under the control of the League in the 1920 elections, the Stillwater twine plant could have become another buyer of Trust-grown sisal. So the Florida venture made perfect sense on the face of things. But did the Trust (and Nonpartisan League from which the Trust arose) have the people to make it work? Harvey's letters suggest that expertise and money were lacking for a good outcome.³¹

Money problems inside the League first became public knowledge about eight months after the Trust was formed. In 1919, North Dakota Attorney General William Langer, who had been feuding with Townley and other League leaders, ordered a surprise audit of the Scandinavian-American Bank. The audit, which Townley tried to quash, indicated that the bank was overextended by risky loans, including those made to the Sisal Trust. Langer's enemies charged he was motivated by his ambition to seize control of the League for his own political advancement. Arguments over Langer's motives have been debated since.³²

Whatever Bill Langer intended, the audit of the Scandinavian-American Bank made headlines around North Dakota. These stories probably crippled the Sisal Trust's chances of getting significant new money to put into the Florida development.

The League in Dire Straits

Other stories had begun to circulate that the League's North Dakota development programs were in financial difficulties. When the League used its 1918 electoral victory to pass bills establishing the Bank of North Dakota, the State Elevator plan and other new government initiatives, it tried to sell investment bonds to pay the costs of getting these entities under way. But the bonds were not selling in 1919. James Waters, as head of the state bank, was being criticized for not solving the problem.³³

In the meantime, Townley added to the NPL's financial strain when he wanted more money to campaign in Minnesota. Some of Townley's close friends thought he was trying to do too much with limited resources. Townley had a history of risk-taking in money matters. When he began farming on a plot of soil near the town of Beach, he borrowed thousands of dollars to plant eight thousand acres of flax in 1912. Dry weather followed by early frost ruined the crop, leaving Townley penniless. He lost his farm and called it bad luck. In the following years as League president, he continued to make grand plans while spending little time on the details necessary to solidify success. When the League won the 1916 elections, he had rushed to set up a campaign headquarters in other states before the League program in North Dakota was solidly developed.³⁴

The farmers' dues payments were always the main source of League revenue. Townley used the North Dakota dues to set up a League office in St. Paul in 1916, then drew on Minnesota dues to cross the Plains states and organize new offices. The rising membership looked good on paper. But as membership grew, so did expenses. Because many dues were paid with IOUs, the League made endorsement deals for farm products and set up the Consumers Stores. Sometimes these business moves antagonized local merchants.³⁵

NAME RECEIVER FOR SISAL TRUST

A receiver has been appointed for the United States Sisal trust, a Florida organization controlled by A. C. Townley, at Bismarck.

A court order issued May 26, last, at Miami, Fla., demanded that Mr. Brinton, as secretary of the trust, turn over all books and records of the concern to the receiver.

According to the court order, such action had been taken by the authorities at Miami on application of L. A. Simpson of Dickinson and J. F. Jaudon of Miami, a majority of the board of trustees.

Postponement of the Waters suit against Mr. Townley and its transfer back to the Cass county district court was made by Judge Cole when an affidavit signed by William Lemke, as attorney general, stated that L. A. Simpson, who was to appear as attorney for Townley in the case, was engaged in the trial of a murder in Hettinger county. Three other attorneys were present in the interests of the defendant but each declared he had no authority to proceed with the trial of the case.

Bismarck Tribune, June 18, 1921, p. 1

Orthodoxy never troubled Townley, whether it concerned business or politics. He readily admitted this, saying in an interview "after the League was organized they charged me with being a socialist," but "the [grain] elevator man doesn't ask you whether you are a Republican, or a Democrat, or a Socialist . . . it got so you couldn't tell a socialist from a Republican" among League members. "I didn't know the difference after a while." The press called Townley a dangerous radical, but for all practical purposes he acted as an opportunist.³⁶

Opportunism had led him into the sisal venture, just as the chance to borrow heavily from a local bank and a farm supply company had tempted him to try and make a fortune on one flax crop. Ironically, the residue of the debt he carried from the flax venture would rise up to ruin him when the sisal scheme fell apart.

Fear and Frustration

Job Brinton claimed in 1920 that Townley had given him shares in the Trust for going to Florida. Brinton had



William Lemke (1878–1950), June 1943. Lemke was the attorney general for North Dakota from 1920 to 1921. He later served four terms in the US House of Representatives and ran for president as a third-party candidate in the 1936 election. SHSND SA E0233-00001

invested much of his savings in more shares. Jim Waters said he was to get the equivalent of his bank salary in return for going to Florida to help Brinton. "For God's sake, Jim, take this deal off my hands," Townley is supposed to have said when he sent Waters to Florida.³⁷

But by the fall of 1919 both men were fed up, certain that the sisal fields would not be fully planted for at least another year. The Florida land seemed always to be rain soaked, and the road work had come to a stop. Sisal and wheat prices fell faster than expected on the commodities exchanges. Neither man had seen a cent for their efforts. Brinton knew that Townley had sworn he was "property-less" in 1918, but afterward had cosigned personal notes with Brinton for his own shares in the Sisal Trust. Brinton feared he would be left holding the bag if the sisal investment collapsed.³⁸

Fear and frustration now seemed to dominate the actions of Brinton and Waters. Their anger may have been

buttressed by political calculations. Back in North Dakota, Langer was attacking Townley and Governor Lynn Frazier for poor leadership in the League. Townley retaliated with a press campaign to discredit Langer and expel him from the NPL. As the internecine bickering grew worse, the price of raw sisal dropped another fifteen cents a pound.³⁹

Waters was coming under greater criticism by newspapers in the state. One official report noted that sales of the bonds for the Bank of North Dakota were meager, while the "indebtedness of the state has increased considerably." Waters was anxious that he was going to be pushed out of his job as the bank's president. He would be blamed as well if the Sisal Trust fell apart.⁴⁰

Waters and Brinton appear to have decided they had better prospects by helping the League's opponents. If so, the deciding moment probably came

in April 1920, when the *Fargo Courier-News*, a League-owned newspaper, published a brief article announcing that Waters was resigning as director of the Bank of North Dakota. The article said Waters had sent in his resignation from Miami, where he was "spending the winter." William Lemke, the NPL legal counsel and one of Townley's closest friends, directed the editorials in the *Courier-News*. A subsequent issue of the *News* printed a facsimile of the resignation letter, noting it was "written on stationery of the Hotel Ta-miami, in Miami, dated, April 1, 1920." The *Bismarck Tribune*, a constant critic of the League, jumped in to tease that "Jim [Waters] and Job [Brinton] are somewhere in the everglades of Florida, watching the sisal sprout." The *Tribune* suggested that Waters—"Marse [Master] Jim"—was moldering in the southeast while his dreams "of power and influence" in the League faded away. Waters denounced the letter as a forgery concocted by Lemke.⁴¹



In 1921, recall was used to remove Governor Lynn Frazier, Attorney General William Lemke, and Commissioner of Agriculture John Hagan from office. Lemke, right, was charged with using public funds to build an overpriced home in Fargo. Frazier, left, retained his good reputation with most voters and went on to serve three terms in the US Senate. Library of Congress LC-H2-B-9122

Soon after that, Brinton sent a letter to Frazier, saying that Townley and Lemke were abusing League funds. He also threatened to "bust things wide open . . . against persons in the League management." Anti-League papers claimed that Waters had sent a telegram to one of Lemke's friends, threatening to "start fireworks" with details of "graft and crookedness."⁴²

The accuracy of these charges and countercharges was never fully established, but it seems clear that Waters and Brinton had decided to cut their losses in Florida in order to salvage their reputations. They used the Sisal Trust as a dagger, thrusting it into Townley, Lemke, and the League. This public fight within the League leadership came just as the 1920 state election campaign got under way, with Langer challenging Frazier for governor, and Lemke running for the attorney general's seat.

The League's legislative majority was also in jeopardy. Brinton and Waters now returned to North Dakota and made a deal with the *Grand Forks Herald* to write five essays providing an exposé of the League, under the title "A. C. Townley, Dreamer, Promotor, Boss Politician." The *Herald* had opposed the League program since its inception, and its editor readily admitted that Brinton and Waters were paid for these pieces. Both men supplied copies of letters and telegrams to back up their narratives.

The most damaging charge in the five-part story was the claim that Townley had invested in the Sisal Trust using League funds; possible use of state money was coyly hinted at as well. Brinton and Waters provided colorful detail, claiming Townley was "induced by a sisal promotor at the Gardner Hotel in Fargo [to] invest money in Florida." Townley thought "it was only a matter of getting a plantation started, as Townley the dreamer dreamed . . . Townley, the promotor . . . put over one of the biggest



Arthur Townley, 1956. After resigning as NPL president in 1922, Townley tried to develop other farming and political organizations over a period of 36 years. None succeeded. *Minnesota Historical Society*

promotion schemes and money-making enterprise[s] ever attempted by a man without capital." They reminded readers that Townley was officially bankrupt at the time.⁴³

The essays were reprinted around the state and put out as a separate pamphlet. Anti-League newspapers reprinted the Sisal Trust's claim that the Trust was not "a Nonpartisan League enterprise, nor are we endorsed by that or any other political or farmers organization. We are a business organization." If so, they asked, then how did Townley find money to invest?⁴⁴

The *Herald* articles wounded the League in the election campaign. To stoke the anger of farmers, anti-

Leaguers showed slides of the Trust's sisal fields in theaters and armories, with close-ups of the unfinished road, weed-strewn fields, and absence of workers. Brinton publicly renounced his support of the NPL. Langer added to the attack, calling Townley a flimflam man who lined his pockets with farmers' dues money. The voting results produced a deadlock. Frazier was reelected governor, Lemke won his race for attorney general, and the League had a slim majority of the state senate, but a minority in the house.⁴⁵

The Aftermath

All remaining Trust efforts in Florida came to an end after the 1920 election. Prices for grain fell to the levels of December 1914. Sisal twine



Much of the NPL platform promoted state-owned industry in an attempt to have more control over agricultural commodities marketing. The Bank of North Dakota and the North Dakota Mill and Elevator are lasting legacies of the NPL, both celebrating 100-year anniversaries in 2019. The North Dakota Mill and Elevator was under construction when the Nonpartisan League officials were removed from office in 1921. SHSND SA 50121

dropped to thirteen cents a pound. The Sisal Trust shareholders lost everything. Brinton claimed \$25,000 in losses, but said Townley lost his reputation.⁴⁶

As the 1921 legislative session began, anti-League newspapers criticized the slow bond sales. The anti-League members of the House conducted an audit and asked if any "public money" had been used by the Sisal Trust. They found no evidence to show this, but used it to publicly suggest that NPL leaders were "financial flukers" who lived well at the government's expense.⁴⁷

Brinton and Waters both testified in the audit hearings, repeating everything they had said in the *Herald* articles. Brinton insisted that Townley and Lemke had embezzled League money. Lemke testified and denied any investment in the Sisal Trust. Townley remained in Minnesota during the hearings, but called Brinton a liar in press stories. Brinton upped the stakes in what appeared to be a setup. He told the investigating committee to "arrest me for libel." He could "subpoena

witnesses . . . to testify [to the truth], and there will be no doubt." Then Bill Langer, as outgoing attorney general, obligingly filed libel charges against Brinton. Lemke, the new attorney general, obviously had to recuse himself, so private attorneys handled the libel trial in the US District Court in Burleigh County.⁴⁸

The trial was a public relations disaster for the League. Brinton testified that Townley bought 160 acres of Florida land in 1917, which he later failed to declare in his subsequent bankruptcy hearing. Additional acreage was purchased, Brinton said, until the sisal "equity [was] something over \$300,000." Brinton added that Townley knew "the Nonpartisan league could not last forever and that he wanted the Florida enterprise as a nest egg." He produced a bank draft from the Scandinavian-American bank records, for eight thousand dollars. The draft was endorsed "payment guaranteed, National Nonpartisan League," and was signed "A. C. Townley, president." This, Brinton said, was for land in Florida. Townley later denied it was his signature; others said it was genuine. The evidence was thin

but the jury acquitted Brinton. That hurt the image of the League.⁴⁹

Brinton's acquittal inaugurated the last act of the sisal venture. The Sisal Trust had gone under, the land and investments lost. Jim Waters sued Townley for the salary he said he had been promised when he went to Florida. That suit was settled out of court, with the terms never disclosed. Brinton took a job to give lectures on the League's "failed programs" and Townley's "secret investments." This all became grist in an extensive petition drive for a recall election. The recall law was a League-sponsored law in 1919. Now it would be used against Governor Frazier and Attorney General Lemke. Many farmers signed the petition, disillusioned by the scandals. Frazier thought he could weather the crisis, but the voters threw him and Lemke out of office in November 1921.⁵⁰

Frazier would recover to restore his popularity and win a seat in Congress in 1922. But Townley's downfall was almost total. Townley's move to Minnesota had made him less prominent in the North Dakota

movement. He now had a growing reputation for high-handedness. A farm journalist who interviewed him claimed Townley thought farmers required “autocratic management before it [the League] is steady enough to stand on its own feet.” Many NPL farmers lost faith in Townley, and he resigned as League president.⁵¹

Using Brinton’s trial testimony, angry creditors demanded that Townley’s 1918 bankruptcy be re-adjudicated to disclose his “hidden assets.” Townley had to hire an attorney and present his finances in court a second time. He denied taking bank loans, but had to admit he did own shares in the Sisal Trust and Florida venture. The admissions voided his earlier bankruptcy.⁵²

This second bankruptcy included new claims against him. His payments on these left him close to penniless. After resigning his NPL office in May 1922, he tried to form new organizations for farmers in the ensuing years, but never recovered his former influence. He died in a road accident in 1959. The NPL survived and continued to influence North Dakota politics. It merged with the Democratic Party in the 1950s. Its legacy today rests on the Bank of North Dakota, the State Mill and Elevator, and other actions to help the lot of the farmers.⁵³

Could Townley have avoided his fate if the sisal venture had worked? Perhaps. The available evidence suggests the Trust members reduced their chances of success from the first day by announcing in 1918 that they would not accept any further investors. T. P. Harvey’s letters show that there was never enough money to cultivate the Florida land properly. The Trust also had bad luck. It went into the sisal market expecting the Great War to last another year or more, only to see Germany collapse a few months later. Sisal prices began dropping immediately.

Worst of all, there is no record showing that anyone with significant experience in growing sisal was ever brought in to advise the Trust. Trust ads in 1918 had carried a photograph showing “750,000 plants, sufficient to establish a 1,000 acre plantation.” But Brinton and Harvey found it to be raw, undeveloped land. Finally, the Trust faced enormous competition. New sisal plantings were in process around the world. Meanwhile, Plains farmers were creating a good substitute. In 1916 International Harvester subsidized farmers in the Red River Valley to grow hemp for a strong and flexible twine. The experiment worked well. Farmers in the Valley had some seven thousand acres of hemp cultivated by 1918.⁵⁴

Basically, Townley and his friends in the Trust tried to do too much with too little. What had been the Trust’s lands are now citrus groves and suburban homes in Dade County. Very few living there today would guess that their lawns were once part of a money-making scheme that began two thousand miles away, only to collapse in bitter controversy.⁵⁵



Terry L. Shoptaugh was the archivist at Minnesota State University Moorhead for twenty-eight years, before retiring in 2014. He is the author of six books and several articles on various aspects of North Dakota history. “Angry

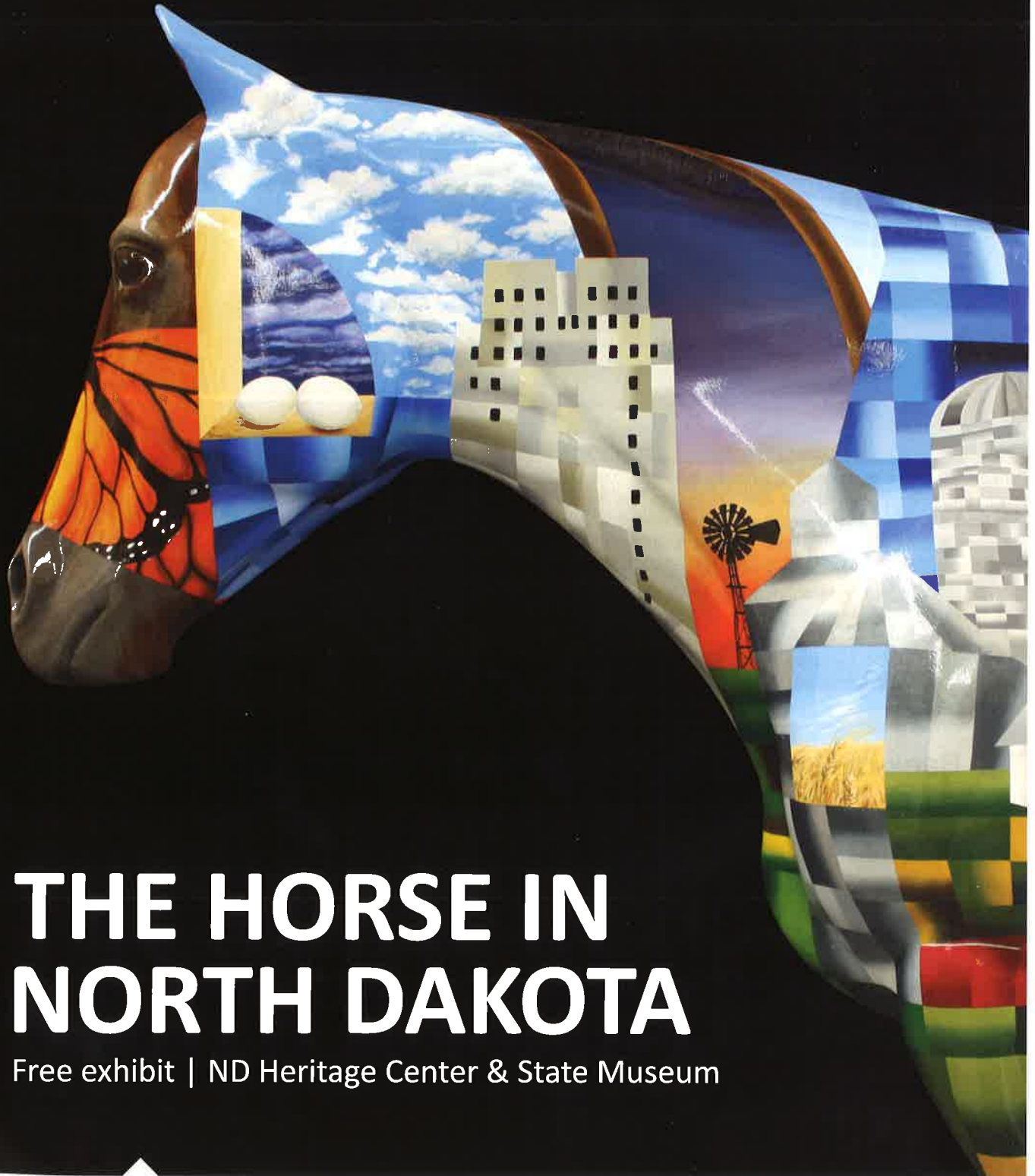
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Bank of North Dakota groundbreaking ceremony, August 29, 2006. Left to right: BND advisory board member John Stewart, Rep. Todd Porter, Rep. Ron Carlisle, Sen. Bob Stenehjem, Gov. John Hoeven, BND President Eric Hardmeyer, Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem, and Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson. SHSND SA 31745-0001-003-00012

The Bank of North Dakota opened its current location at the corner of Main Avenue and Memorial Highway in Bismarck in 2008. SHSND SA 31745-0001-003-00001



The Bank of North Dakota Celebrates 100 Years

North Dakota is the only state in the nation to own its own bank. The 1916 and 1918 statewide elections resulted in the Nonpartisan League (NPL) gaining control of all branches of state government. The NPL used its clout in the 1919 legislative session to pass its Industrial Program, which formed the North Dakota Industrial Commission in charge of creating and managing a state-owned bank. Opening in July 1919, the Bank of North Dakota has survived legal challenges to its existence, NPL corruption, the Great Depression, and the uneasiness of several boom and bust cycles of the state's economy.

Originally located in downtown Bismarck, the bank received approval to spend \$11 million (which ended up being over \$12 million) from the 2005 Legislative Assembly to construct a new building. The groundbreaking ceremony was held August 29, 2006, and the new bank building opened its doors on January 22, 2008.

The State Archives holds approximately 450 feet of records from the Bank of North Dakota, including annual reports, committee minutes, audit reports, and budget files. Some of the more intriguing series include Oil Boom Scrapbooks (1951–61, Series 31041), President's Subject Files (1955–2008, Series 31235), and the Closed Farm Loan Files (Series 31333), which are currently restricted by statute. This series consists of loan applications, appraisals, correspondence, and schedules of payments, reports, and payment notices. Most of these loan files are from the 1930s, arguably the most economically challenging time for farmers in North Dakota, before and since. These records often document the condition of the land, the farm operation, and the character of the farmer. For economic researchers and the curious genealogist, these records could prove to be a valuable resource. The State Archives is currently looking into potential options to make these records accessible to the public.

Shane A. Molander, deputy state archivist, State Archives

Games Entertain at Cold War Missile Site

Boredom was not a constant staple of life at a missile alert facility such as Oscar-Zero, now part of Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile State Historic Site near Cooperstown, but Air Force managers realized that there was a need to help pass the time during quiet periods. Today, one may find modern video game consoles, streaming web television, and cell phone coverage at modern missile facilities such as those around Minot Air Force Base, but during the life of the Grand Forks Air Force Base missile field (1964–95) such amenities did not exist. Satellite television was new during the 1980s, and in an age before the Internet, books often offered the best escape from long, dull hours.

Of course, outdoor recreation was limited in North Dakota during cold weather seasons. While in service, large expanses of the lawn at Oscar-Zero were actually dangerous to linger in due to radio-frequency radiation emanating from the cone-shaped, ultrahigh frequency antenna and the medium frequency antenna field beyond the fence.

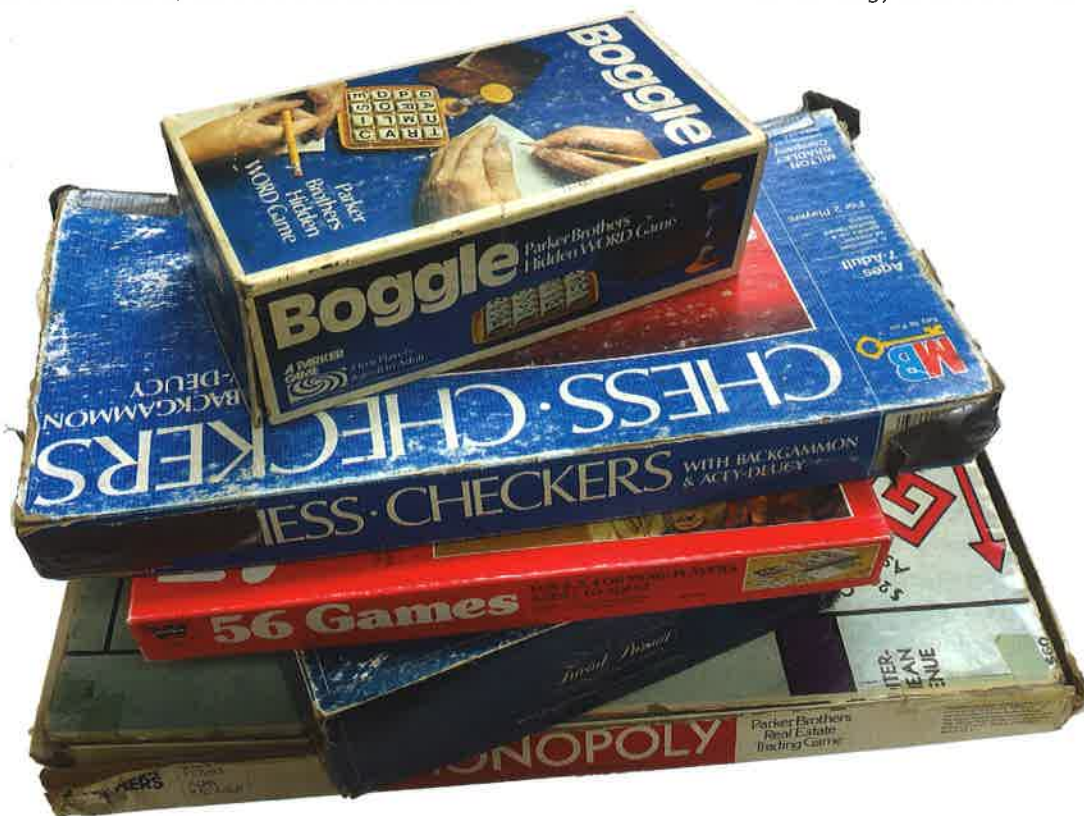
One distraction that could be counted on was card games and board games. Many hands of solitaire were sure to be played here along with cribbage and pinochle if a partner could be found. At Oscar-Zero, the Air Force left behind

Boggle, Trivial Pursuit, Scattergories, Monopoly, a Whitman 56 Games combination box, and the standard chess/checkers board. One might even imagine three young, buzz-cut airmen in fatigues arguing over building hotels on Park Place within the confines of Oscar-Zero's living room-like day room area.

A three-day tour of duty in the missile field was assuredly not always dull for the Air Force "ARTs," security-minded and fully armed Alarm Response Teams dispatched in a moment's notice to investigate a perimeter motion alarm at an unstaffed missile silo some ten miles away in the cold of winter. These teams were ready to fire on attackers and defend the nuclear missile that sat below.

Twenty-one years later, and ten years after Oscar-Zero opened its doors for public tours, the board games today are accessioned museum collection pieces. This summer, some fun and outdoor games will return to the site as the Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile State Historic Site celebrates a decade of fifty-feet-below-ground tours operated by the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

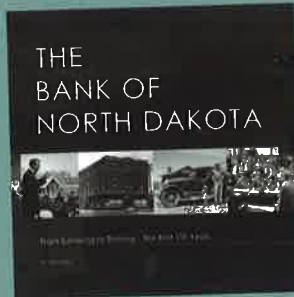
*Robert M. Branting, site supervisor,
Archaeology & Historic Preservation Division*



BOOK Reviews

The Bank of North Dakota: From Surviving to Thriving—The First 100 Years

Mike Jacobs. Bismarck: Dakota Institute Press of Bismarck State College, 2018. 127 pp. \$47.99 (hardcover). Illustrations, source list, index.



The Bank of North Dakota: From Surviving to Thriving—The First 100 Years does not belong on your shelves. Measuring in at a substantial square foot, it is a book you will want to place on your coffee table to read, enjoy the photographs, and make reference to with frequency. The volume is well and colorfully illustrated, and provides not only a history of the State Bank of North Dakota but also of the political forces that surrounded it from its inception to today.

Mike Jacobs, former editor of the *Grand Forks Herald* and a historian of all things North Dakota, undertook the preparation of this celebratory volume at the request of Eric Hardmeyer, current bank president. In undertaking the task, Jacobs has significantly enhanced our understanding of the bank. Previous to this effort, only two other histories of the institution existed: Alvin S. Tostlebe's *The Bank of North Dakota: An Experiment in Agrarian Banking* (1924) appeared too soon for a nuanced examination, while Rozanne Enerson Junker's *The Bank of North Dakota: An Experiment in State Ownership* (1989) is of considerable value, but is now somewhat dated and exceptionally hard to locate.

A study of the bank is meritorious for a number of reasons. Not only is it the nation's only state-owned bank, but it is successful in returning considerable funds to the state's general fund on an annual basis. It has provided the youth of North Dakota with state-sponsored student loans, helped to maintain the state's agricultural roots, and made home ownership possible for many. That it even exists, a story with socialistic roots, is a bit of a miracle.

A product of the Nonpartisan League's brief triumph, the bank nearly came to an end when residents voted the members of the governing Industrial Commission from office, but ultimately determined to keep the products of its success: the state mill/elevator, state hail insurance, home builders' association, and, of course, the bank.

In a very readable manner, Jacobs traces the history of the bank through periods of quiescence, when it seemed the bank

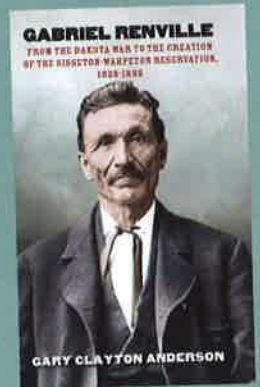
might disappear, to its triumphant offering of loans to allow 57,000 youth to further their educations beyond high school, as well as its vast programs to ensure veterans, the elderly, and the ill proper housing and health care. A few problems arose along the way: potentially illegal insurance schemes and conflict of interest issues, as well as an ill-fated effort to export potatoes to Honduras.

Jacobs may seem a bit close to the material, and though he claims argument and potential errors for himself, assistance from the Bank of North Dakota seems to have been significant. Still, buy the book. It will look good on your coffee table, give your neighbors confirmation of your intelligence, and provide not only a history of the state bank, but also a general history of the state since 1900.

Kimberly K. Porter is a professor of history at the University of North Dakota. She focuses her work on issues related to the state and region, particularly agricultural and oral history.

Gabriel Renville: From the Dakota War to the Creation of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation, 1825–1892

Gary Clayton Anderson. Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2018. 220 pp. \$29.95 (hardcover). Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.



The Dakota conflict in its broad lineaments is well known: the corruption and double-dealing of reservation agents and traders, the resistance of the Dakota people to encroachments on their Minnesota land base, the attacks on New Ulm and Fort Ridgely, the reluctant leadership of Little Crow, and the awful aftermath at Mankato. Less known, however, are the internal divisions among the Dakotas themselves involving competing visions of survival and coexistence articulated by tribal leaders like Gabriel Renville. During and after the conflict, Renville emerged as a shrewd leader and canny advocate for his people, the Sisseton-Wahpeton. Now historian Gary Clayton Anderson tells his story, a story that encompasses much of the nineteenth century.

Anderson is especially strong in holding together the threads of Renville's complicated familial and tribal antecedents, as well as tracing his shifting roles as trader, scout, diplomat, lobbyist, and chief. The grandson of a French fur trader, Gabriel Renville grew up in an extended

familial network of American Indians and white people involved in the fur trade, itself grounded in kinship and reciprocal obligations. As a result, he could be involved with the traders in seeking Dakota endorsement of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux on the one hand, while playing the role of generous head man on the other. As such, he helped various groups of Sissetons, Ojibwes, and others “navigate through the federal government and its battery of agents” (110). With this in mind, labels like “progressive” and “traditionalist” don’t capture Renville’s complexity. He was both. He could be “tolerant” of Christianity but never converted himself, and he kept more than one wife. He could also directly challenge reservation agents when their Christianization policy threatened his position and upset his people. On more than one occasion he travelled to Washington to go over the agent’s head, so to speak, leading to changes in reservation administration.

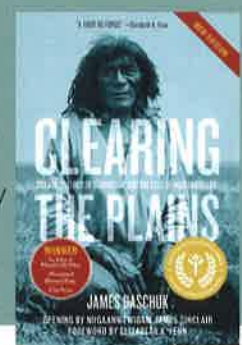
Unfortunately, Renville’s last major battle ended in failure—the effort to control the terms and pace of allotment of the Sisseton reservation. Even before the Dawes Act, allotment had come to the reservation. Renville and others had developed successful farms and increased tribal self-sufficiency. Yet the Dawes provisions for “excess” land opened the reservation to internal and external pressures. Internally, some Sissetons, many of them Christians, looked to the distribution of a sizable cash payout. Externally, settlers had already come to the boundaries of the reservation and eyed additional development as a prelude to statehood. Renville himself was torn. Increased contacts with whites brought opportunities as well as dangers, but Native land ownership and ultimately citizenship also seemed a worthy goal. Renville was overtaken by events. Allotment and compensation were pushed through. Now he could only try to influence who received land and who didn’t, as the news of allotment attracted newcomers to the reservation who did not share the history and connections to himself by which Renville seemed to adjudge fitness. Against this backdrop, on September 16, 1892, Renville died, “without knowing if his people would have the ability to embrace this new age” (152). Like tribes throughout the West, the Sisseton and Wahpeton people ultimately lost much of their land. Yet, Anderson ends his biography on a hopeful note, briefly tracing the resurgence of the people, as tribal self-government and education, two ideas strongly supported by Renville, guide the people into the future.

Anderson has written an important book that uses the biography of a leader to illuminate the complexities of what came after the Dakota conflict. In so doing, he has laid down a path for future historians to follow, tracing the many stories of human agency and resilience throughout the American Indian West.

Joseph C. Jastrzembski is a professor of history at Minot State University. He has published on the Apache Indians and has worked on Mandan language preservation.

Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life

James Daschuk. Regina, SK: University of Regina, 2019. 318 pp. \$27.95 (paperback). Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.



Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life has won several well-deserved awards since its first publication in 2013, and this new edition includes a foreword by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Elizabeth A. Fenn. Author James Daschuk has produced a fine-grained, well-researched history that connects the devastating effects of microbes on First Nations peoples during the fur trade to the starvation, disease, and mass death of the reservation era. Reviewers have rightly praised Daschuk for his willingness to argue that the Canadian government used starvation to encourage Native people to move to Reserves in the second half of the nineteenth century. The parallels between the history of Canada and the United States make this an important book for US readers.

The first chapter examines the health of Indigenous societies before the arrival of European settlers. Like many scholars, Daschuk notes that “North America was not a disease-free paradise” (2). He argues, however, that the disease First Nations peoples experienced before the arrival of Europeans paled in comparison to what they experienced after the incorporation of North America into the global economy. The epidemics that resulted from the fur trade and European settlement transformed the demographics of Native America. According to Daschuk, “entire cultural entities, such as the Basquia and Pegogamaw Cree, ceased to exist” (40).

In the second half of the book, Daschuk shifts his focus to the Canadian acquisition of the Plains and the growth of settler agriculture. He points out that First Nations peoples saw treaties as conservative; they hoped to ensure Native ownership of their land and to guarantee that they would receive aid in converting to agriculture. The unwillingness of the Canadian government to honor these treaties coincided with the large-scale destruction of bison herds. The result was starvation. In 1879, for example, some Niitsipati traded “their horses for a few cups of flour” in attempt to stave off hunger (111). The reduced health of First Nations peoples encouraged widespread outbreaks of disease. Tuberculosis preyed on already weakened bodies.

The Canadian government’s refusal to meet treaty obligations or provide relief to starving Native communities led to violence in 1885, including the Métis North-West Rebellion led by Louis Riel. After the government regained control, it punished First Nations people believed to be rebellious

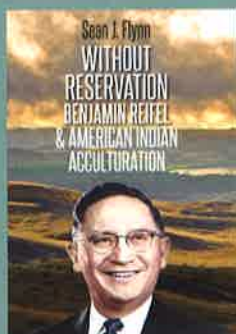
by severely cutting rations. Poor conditions at residential schools added to the death tolls by encouraging eruptions of tuberculosis among Native children. Many Métis responded by relinquishing their Indian identity, while some Native communities tried to escape to the United States.

The strength of Daschuk's work is his ability to weave the histories of multiple First Nations communities across several generations into a single story. The result is a beautifully written, disturbing history that reminds us that the devastation found within many First Nations communities is the result of human action and policies. At times, Daschuk prioritizes the narrative arc and details of the story that he wants to tell over his argument. Overall, however, it is an engaging book. Its argument has important ramifications for our understanding of Canadian policies toward First Nations peoples—both historically and today.

Amanda Hendrix-Komoto is an assistant professor in the department of history and philosophy at Montana State University, where she researches the history of Mormon missionary work among Native Americans and Polynesians.

Without Reservation: Benjamin Reifel and American Indian Acculturation

Sean J. Flynn. Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2018. 281 pp. \$29.95 (hardcover). Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.



All American Indians must acculturate. Benjamin Reifel, PhD (1906–90), personifies those who chose to enter the dominant society wholeheartedly. Author Sean Flynn provides a warm and laudatory biography based on extensive interviews with Reifel's daughter and colleagues. He notes Reifel's continuing proud identification with his Rosebud Lakota origin, bilingualism, and efforts to rectify the economic and social legacies of colonialism, but Flynn emphasizes Reifel's acculturation.

As a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) spokesperson, Reifel was instrumental in gaining Native American support for the Indian Reorganization Act. After serving in World War II he was promoted to superintendent of Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota during the wrenching relocation caused by the Pick-Sloan Plan, which flooded much of the reservation. Later he was the first Native American to serve as superintendent of the always politically tumultuous Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. He moved to Aberdeen, South Dakota, as BIA area director and retired in 1960. Along the way he wrote a Harvard dissertation modeling a relocation program for Fort Berthold Reservation.

Reifel grew up in a ranching family with a German-American father and Lakota mother on Rosebud Reservation in south-central South Dakota. He was encouraged by non-Natives and attended South Dakota State University, where he was a popular student leader. He married a non-Native after college. Reifel went to work for the BIA accepting that Native Americans should pursue integrated education to move them from clinging to the past and to enter the modern world. Time, work, and saving were his mantra. He echoed American Indian policy.

After becoming area director and moving to the non-reservation town of Aberdeen, Reifel joined the mainstream of South Dakota organizations and social life. Being Native American was part of his identity, but being a South Dakotan American was the rest. His five terms as South Dakota's congressperson, followed by his appointment as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1975 by President Gerald Ford, illustrate the dual nature of his successful life.

Flynn, who is himself Lakota, avoids devoting attention to Reifel's detractors. The dominant American Indian choice has been in direct opposition to the near-assimilation advocated by Reifel. Documenting resistance to the Pick-Sloan Plan and to the relocation policy Reifel supported would have enriched the biography. Reifel might have been well liked and as admirable as Flynn indicates, but a better biography would have been more nuanced and pursued the complexities of Reifel's lifetime. Nonetheless, this book is well worth reading for its revelations about the often-ignored 1950s in Native American history.

Gregory Gagnon is an adjunct professor of American Indian law at Loyola University of New Orleans. He is a citizen of Bad River Reservation and a professor emeritus of American Indian studies at the University of North Dakota. His most recent book is The Story of the Chippewa.



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