

Finding Aid to the Ben H. Barrett Papers

Barrett, Ben H., 1889-1984

Benjamin H. Barrett papers, ca. 1950-1975

.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 255

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

Links: Finding aid to the [Ben H. Barrett Photograph Collection](#)

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Provenance: Donated by Ben Barrett, 1982 (Acc. 2083).

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Citation: [Identification of item]. Benjamin H. Barrett Papers, MS 255, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

BIOGRAPHY

Ben Barrett was born November 12, 1889 at Nebo, N.D. in Steele County, the son of Oscar and Isabelle (Olin) Barrett. He obtained his Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture in 1912 at the North Dakota Agriculture College. In 1916 he married Addie Stafford, a former college classmate. Addie was born February 2, 1893 near Buffalo, N.D. and graduated from Fargo High School. Their son, Howard, was born on June 17, 1917. An influenza epidemic took the life of Addie Barrett in 1918. Ben then operated a dairy farm in Fargo, N.D. and later worked for thirteen years at Staples, Minnesota. He returned to North

Dakota and served as county extension agent in Cavalier County, N.D. from 1928 to 1934 and in Emmons County, N.D. from 1934 until his retirement in 1959. He remarried in 1935 to Gertrude Rose Wienecke of Loma, N.D. A son, Robert Edward, and a daughter, Kathleen Lou, were born to the couple. In 1967 Gertrude Barrett died. Ben also worked for rural electrification and was actively involved with the improvement of the agricultural program. He served as vice-president and secretary-treasurer of the North Dakota County Agents Association. In retirement he began to paint and write. Ben Barrett died on November 17, 1984. He is buried at Riverside Cemetery in Fargo.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Ben Barrett papers include material on his family lineage, term paper, and manuscripts of his writings, including his memories as a county agent. Not all material is dated. However, those documents that are dated range from 1842 to 1975. Also donated at the same time and processed separately are many photographs, slides and films.

The [Family Lineage Series](#) consists of a folder strictly pertaining to his family. There is a listing of who Mr. Barrett married, his children's names and dates that they were born. Also included is a list of the names of his children's spouses and his grandchildren.

Ben Barrett's father was Oscar Barthalomew Barrett (1842–1930). Enclosed is a typed transcription of his Civil War diary (the original is part of Mss 1001) that he kept while he was enlisted in Company D of the First Wisconsin Cavalry. He fought in a few battles and skirmishes in eastern Tennessee and joined in Wilson's raids. He received 2nd Lieutenant and in August left the service at the end of the Civil War. There is also a biographical sketch of him written by son Ben.

Another folder documents Ben Barrett's feelings with overseas travel. However, his son-in-law and daughter had moved Africa to receive better paying jobs. So in 1967 he flew to Africa. While in Africa his wife Gertrude became ill and was hospitalized. Shortly thereafter she died. In this story he reflects on the Vietnam War and his thoughts about President Johnson and J.F. Kennedy. Finally he reminisces (20 typescript leaves) about his boyhood activities in Steele County, and what he remembers of the place and the people, especially the town of Sherbrooke.

The [Term Paper Series](#) consists of a paper written by Kathleen Barrett in 1957 entitled "My Wonderful Dad." It is a short biography of Ben Barrett's life from birth to that present day in 1957.

The [Manuscript Series](#) contains numerous stories that he wrote about the people he grew up with, his early days, problems with farming, pets, children, cemeteries, etc. All are typed manuscripts, some with additional notes and editing as well as cut and pasted sections.

Westfield Cemetery is about a local cemetery in Steele County, N.D. where his mother was buried. She died when he was quite young.

The Palmer Foss manuscript contains two versions recounting the life of a young man and football player that Ben knew during their years at North Dakota Agricultural College. Ben followed his career and everything that he did. The “Gilmore Dobie’s Team” is a story about a coach who took the North Dakota Agricultural College by ‘storm.’ He never allowed the team to lose one game from 1906 to 1907. He was a sensational coach for his time. “Girl Hunt” is a story about a potentially disturbed girl. She got lost in the woods and a search party was sent out to find her. They placed her in an institute and no one has seen her since.

The “Blizzard Saga” shows a clear picture how winters can be in North Dakota and Minnesota. The journey he embarks on is after his first wife died and he was moving closer to his father’s farm in 1919. The “Old Pet” describes Ben as a young boy wanting to have a pony for his birthday. However, his parent’s were never able to afford a horse for a pet. But when Ben and his wife, Gertrude, purchased a pony for their son’s birthday they realized how much it really meant to them all to have such a pet.

“Human Hopes Blasted for Wildlife” depicts the struggle between government and farmers. The need to have public land and some land set aside for parks and recreation is essential. But when the government takes away from someone’s homeland and dream, is it worth the fight for conversationalists. “Fire Bug” is a collection of different fires that broke out around the communities and how neighbors helped one another. “Life in Old Winona” gives a clear example of an older town started, namely Winona in Emmons County, N.D. It describes the general store, saloon, and livery stable.

The “Pioneer Days; seen in boyhood days” is a paper about the North Dakota prairies of Ben Barrett’s childhood. A large portion describes working on the farm with his father, growing up in a rural area, schools, neighbors, and especially about Sherbrook, N.D.

The “Memories of a County Agent” is the most extensive of the manuscripts and reflects four revisions he made before being published in 1976, although the final manuscript is not as complete as the published work. The manuscripts are a compilation of many stories documenting his years as a county agent in Cavalier and Emmons counties of North Dakota. Topics covered include the lack of action taken to grow new crops, problems dealing with grasshoppers, fertilizers, sleeping sickness in horses, a sweet clover program, different programs dealing with livestock and finally schools. Other topics include “Cavalier County,” “Human Hopes Blasted for Wildlife,” “Silage,” “Innovation of the Combine Harvester,” “The Dam County Agent,” and “Strained Relations.”

In addition there are more stories about “Cavalier County.” It also discusses the “Homemakers Club,” “4-H,” different bands played and listened to, agricultural crops, livestock, rural electricity and the county war board.

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Term Paper Series

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