

Father William C. Sherman Homestead Photograph Collection

Direct way to Father William C. Sherman Photograph Collection (located on www.digitalhorizonsonline.org):

<http://www.digitalhorizonsonline.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/ndsu-sherman>

Biographical Information about Father William C. Sherman



Father William C. Sherman was born in 1927. After high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, serving in the Philippines and Japan towards the end of World War II. He graduated in 1951 from St. John's University, Collegeville, MN with a B.A. degree in sociology and philosophy, earning a Divinity Degree in 1955. In 1965, Sherman received a Master of Arts Degree in sociology from the University of North Dakota. Father Sherman taught Sociology of the Great Plains and Religion at NDSU from 1971 to 2001. He was Pastor of St. Michael Catholic Church at Grand Forks from 1976 to 2003. In 2003, Father William C. Sherman was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Leadership, University of Mary, Bismarck. In May 2014, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. He is retired and living in Grand Forks where he continues to write and research.

Father William C. Sherman is a well-known and celebrated North Dakota scholar and educator. His genuine interest in sociology, architecture and anthropological studies enabled him to create numerous works which highlight the unique and complex history of North Dakota inhabitants. The subjects of his special attention is the early development of pioneer settlements primarily in central and western North Dakota.

How the Collection Came into Being

Father Sherman traveled with NDSU students, including John Guererro and Leo Kim, to photograph architecturally historic farmsteads. Photographs were usually taken in the summers primarily between 1972 and 1976, and occasionally some were taken in winter. To complete the ambitious project Father Sherman encouraged student participation.

“For about 10 years at NDSU, I’d get the architecture and the history students together and we’d saturate the state studying the housing Germans from Russia built out there. They didn’t build sod houses. They didn’t build claim sheds. They built houses out of adobe, just like they did back in the Black Sea area near Odessa, Ukraine.” – Father William C. Sherman

In 1995 and 1997, Father Sherman and John Guererro traveled to Odessa, Ukraine and took hundreds of slides of buildings in former Black Sea and Bessarabian German colonies.

Father Sherman and his research crew also gathered valuable information related to building techniques and solutions, as well as anthropological and linguistic data. He collected more information on the technical process of preparing the clay plaster for the clay-bricked German-Russian dwellings and the construction of the Ukrainian stove-heater. The multitude of images offer detailed examples of building techniques and materials to help create an “insider’s guide” to the everyday life of the Northern Great Plains settlers.

About the Collection Contents

The complete collection encompasses over 13,000 black and white photographs, negatives, and slides. The objects of interest include houses and other dwellings, barns, sheds and various agricultural structures. It also documents interior and domestic architecture of the settlers. The collection also includes Bank of North Dakota homes that were foreclosed during the 1930s. Today, many of these structures no longer exist.

A Word on Ethnicity and Religion

The prairie homesteads belonged mostly to the Germans from Russia who emigrated from the Black Sea shores, Odessa region, and Crimean peninsula of modern day Ukraine, as well as the steppes of Bessarabia (Moldova). The collection is culturally complex and representative. Numerous groups other than Germans from Russia were discovered during Sherman’s expeditions – among them Ukrainians, Norwegians, Czechs, English, Estonian and Jewish origins. This diversity reflects the complexity of the population of the Crimean Peninsula. German settlers from various regions, such as Southern Russia, Bohemia and Hungary (Banat) Germans comprised the largest group. The Sherman images largely represent Germans from Russia and Ukrainians who settled in North Dakota. The denominations represented are Catholic, Lutheran and Mennonite.

Books by Father William C. Sherman

[African Americans in North Dakota](#)

[Plains Folks: North Dakota’s Ethnic History](#)

[Prairie Mosaic: An Atlas of Rural North Dakota \(1983\)](#)

[Prairie Mosaic: An Atlas of Rural North Dakota \(New Edition, 2017\)](#)

[Prairie Peddlers: Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota](#)

[Russian-German Settlements in the United States](#) (Chapter, Prairie Architectures of the Russian-German Settlers, pages 189-195)

[Scattered Steeples: The Fargo Diocese, a Written Celebration of Its Centennial](#)

[Selz, Russia: Home Colony](#)

[St. Michael’s Church and the Native Americans](#) (Grand Forks, North Dakota)

[Valerian Paczek: Polish Priest, War Hero](#)

[Wagons North: Minnesota to Oregon](#)

Other Publications

“Assimilation in a North Dakota German-Russian community”, M.A. Thesis, 1965, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks (available at GRHC)