

Finding Aid to the Myrtle Porterville Photograph Collection

Porterville, Myrtle Bemis, 1880-1961

Myrtle Porterville Photograph Collection, 1880s-1950s

5, 731 photographic prints

1, 857 film negatives

Collection number: Photo Mss 296
Photo Folio 15
Photo Oversize Folder 11

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OVERVIEW

Links: Finding aid to the [Myrtle Porterville Papers](#)
View collection in [Digital Horizons](#)

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Donated by Myrtle Porterville, 1954 and 1956 (Acc. 296).

Property rights: The Institute for Regional Studies owns the property rights to this collection.

Copyrights: Copyright to images in this collection remain with the creator, are in the public domain. Images taken by Myrtle Porterville held by the Institute.

Citation: Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo (item number)

BIOGRAPHY

Myrtle Bemis was born January 5, 1880 at Newton, Wisconsin, the daughter of Henry and Weltha (Haddock) Bemis. In 1882 the family moved to Steele County near Cooperstown, North Dakota. At the age of eighteen, Miss Bemis began to teach in rural schools. She later attended Valley City Normal School from where she graduated in 1902. After teaching in Williston and rural schools for several years she attended the University of North Dakota where she received her masters' degree in history in 1909.

On June 15, 1910 Miss Bemis married Charles Albert Porterville, a farmer near Cooperstown. He was born May 19, 1875 at Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. They farmed for five years and Mr. Porterville was also a rural mail carrier. They later lived in Cooperstown where Mr. Porterville worked in various stores. Mrs. Porterville taught school at Larimore for several years and then in the Cooperstown schools from 1923 to 1933. They adopted a son Claude who was born in 1916. Mr. Porterville died May 14, 1934. Thereafter Mrs. Porterville lived with her mother and brother on the home farm. There she cared for her mother and kept house for her brother until his death in 1958. Mrs. Porterville died February 16, 1961 in California and was buried in the Cooperstown Cemetery.

Mrs. Porterville took an early interest in the history of Griggs County, which started her long career in collecting almost everything documenting the history of the county. She began to do extensive research and collecting while teaching in Cooperstown, enlisting the help of her students. Mrs. Porterville even learned to speak and read Norwegian in order to help in her work. She wrote a history of the county, which was serialized in the *Griggs County Sentinel-Courier* newspaper.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Myrtle Porterville Photograph Collection represents images she collected or copied as well as snapshots she herself took. They are part of Mrs. Porterville's documentation of Griggs County, N.D. This extensive collection covers a wide array of subjects, towns and people of the county, and it compliments the extensive historical documentation she compiled and collected from the 1920s into the 1950s. The documentary collection has been organized as Mss 296. The photograph collection has been organized into four series: Topical, People and Portraits, Rose Family, and Sanderson Family. In addition there are the negatives to some of the images in the collection. These include photographs taken by Mrs. Porterville and copy negative of photographs which she borrowed. The negatives, which number 1,857 items, have not yet been linked to the appropriate print.

The [Topical Series](#) contains images of a wide variety of subject and geographic locations, most of which were taken in Griggs County, N.D. The majority date from the late 1800s into the 1920s. This series is organized alphabetically by subject or town. It consists primarily of original photograph prints collected by Mrs. Porterville or copies of older images that she apparently borrowed and had negatives and prints made. There is also a substantial number of snapshots taken by Mrs. Porterville from the 1950s.

The series includes many farming images, farmsteads and houses, town scenes including of businesses, schools and students, and many documenting the town of Cooperstown, the county seat. There are also images of the Cooper Brothers' farm and family who operated a bonanza farm near Cooperstown. Most of the images have written identification on the back of the print, done by Mrs. Porterville. Some also state from whom she received the photograph.

The [People and Portraits Series](#), the largest series in the collection, contains over 3,600 images of individuals and families who resided in the county, and images of family and friends living elsewhere in the country. Most of the images date from the 1890s into the 1920s. Mrs. Porterville identified most persons, likely done at the time she acquired them. The photographs are organized alphabetically by family name or the most prominent name written on the back of the image. Since many photographs are of more than one person, it is impossible to identify each and every individual within this finding aid.

The [Rose Family Series](#) consists of photographs that Mrs. Porterville received from the family of Dr. Fred Rose, a long-time dentist at Cooperstown, N.D. Dr. Rose was born in Ontario, Canada in 1874. Before opening his practice in Cooperstown in 1898 he practiced for a number of years in Fargo and Chicago. These photographs were originally a separate collection within the Porterville collection and that

distinction has been retained. Many of the images have “Rose’s photo” written on the back by Mrs. Porterville. Most of the images are portraits of people, and only a limited number are of the Rose family themselves. The photographers represented in this collection are primarily from Cooperstown and the Fargo-Moorhead area. The time period represented by the collection is from the 1890s into the 1930s.

The [Sanderson Family Series](#) of photographs were left at the Sander Sanderson home in Griggs County after Mr. Sanderson’s death in 1941. Apparently Mrs. Porterville acquired them some time after that. Mr. Sanderson was born in Oslo, Norway in 1859. In 1871 he, his mother, and brother joined their father who was living in Illinois, likely the Chicago area. In 1881 Mr. Sanderson settled in Griggs County, N.D.

Most, if not all, of the 185 Sanderson Family photographs are not identified. The vast majority of photographers represented on the cabinet photographs are from Chicago with a small number from Viroqua, Wisconsin. Based upon the photographic processes and clothing styles represented in this collection, the images date from the 1870s into the 1890s.

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