Finding Aid to the
Erling N. Rolfsrud Photograph Collection

Rolfsrud, Erling N., 1912-1994
Erling N. Rolfsrud Photograph Collection, 1880s-1960s
221 photographic prints
Collection number: Photo 2057

OVERVIEW

**Links:** Finding aid to the first accession of Erling Rolfsrud Papers
Finding aid to the second accession of Erling Rolfsrud Papers
View collection on Digital Horizons

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

**Provenance:** Deposited by Beverly Rolfsrud, 1995 (Acc. 2424).

**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.

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

**BIOGRAPHY**

Erling Nicolai Rolfsrud was born September 3, 1912, near Keene, North Dakota on the farm of his parents Nils and Rebecca (Heide) Rolfsrud. He attended Watford City High School and graduated from there in 1930. He briefly attended Minot State College and then taught rural schools for three years in McKenzie County. He attended Concordia College at Moorhead, Minnesota and received a Bachelor’s degree in 1936. Mr. Rolfsrud was on the staff of the North Dakota Education Association for several years, and in 1939 he began writing a column titled “Top Drawer” for its journal *North Dakota Teacher*, which he continued writing for 22 years. In 1941 he married Beverly Brown of Hettinger, N.D. That same year, he began teaching typing and
shorthand classes at Concordia College, and headed the Department of Business Education at Concordia until 1946. After his tenure at Concordia, Mr. Rolfsrud spent eleven years as a freelance writer and produced over ten books. During this period, he lived near Deerwood and Alexandria, Minnesota, where he continued to reside until the time of his death. In 1952, he was a lyceum lecturer for one year in North Dakota schools, and spoke about North Dakota history, and “Extraordinary North Dakotans”. In 1957, he began teaching English at Alexandria High School, which he continued to do until 1978. Mr. Rolfsrud also taught an Adult Education Creative Writing course in Alexandria.

Mr. Rolfsrud was a prolific writer who wrote articles and short stories, as well as newspaper columns for several North Dakota and Minnesota newspapers. He is an author who published 31 books from 1949-1993, many of which are about North Dakota and have North Dakota settings. He may best be remembered for his books on North Dakota. Some of his better known books include: Lanterns Over the Prairies, Book I (1949), Lanterns Over the Prairies, Book II (1950), Gopher Tails for Papa (1951), White Angakok (1952), Brother to the Eagle (1952) Extraordinary North Dakotans (1954), Boy from Johnny Butte, (1954) Cobber Chronicle (1966), Story of the Red River Land (1967), and Flickertail Stories (1989).

In addition to his writing, Mr. Rolfsrud traveled the state of North Dakota giving speeches and lectures on his writing and the state’s history. Mr. Rolfsrud also taught a Bethel Bible class, and was a church organist for forty years. In 1965, Mr. Rolfsrud was selected as one of the 75 “Heroes” in North Dakota’s history, and in 1989 he was inducted into North Dakota’s Scandinavian-American Hall of Fame. Mr. Rolfsrud died August 21, 1994 at Alexandria, Minnesota. He is survived by his wife and six children.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Erling N. Rolfsrud Photograph Collection consists of 221 photographic prints, which are organized into nineteen files. They were withdrawn from the Rolfsrud papers when they were being processed. These images were collected or taken by Mr. Rolfsrud in connection with his research and writing on North Dakota. The first file consists of three portraits of Mr. Rolfsrud. They include a formal portrait, Mr. Rolfsrud seated at his work desk and outside his Minnesota home.

The Portraits Series have been organized alphabetically by name. Consult the container list for specific names. There are also three unidentified original photographs mounted on cardboard.

The Native Americans Series consists of several portraits, busts done by Ida Prokop Lee that are now on display at the North Dakota Heritage Center, the Medicine Rock historic site marker, and other Indian sites. Consult the container listing for specific names.

The Geographic File Series is arranged alphabetically by North Dakota town. Towns represented include Bismarck, Devils Lake, Grand Forks, Grassy Butte, Jamestown, New Salem, Pembina, and Rugby. The content listing also includes the specific building or view associated with each town.

The remaining photographs have been organized into a Topical Series, arranged alphabetically. Topics include Agriculture, Carl Ben Eielson, Homesteading, International Peace Garden, Marquis de Mores chateau, Thomas McGloey, the Mobile Hearing and Speech Clinic sponsored by the North Dakota Chapter of the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults,
Norwegian yarn dolls, Paul Broste Rock Museum at Parshall, N.D., and Transportation. Short descriptive title for each image is included in the contents section. Of particular note are the dust bowl images in the Agriculture file, the homesteading images, those of the hearing and speech clinic, and of Thomas McGoey.

The *McKenzie County, N.D. Series* contains a series of six photographs of McKenzie glued onto paper together with written descriptions. The descriptions are included in the contents portion of this finding aid. The images are from the Alexander, N.D. area.

The *Red River Land Series* is composed of 96 snapshots of various landscapes and landmarks in the Red River Valley, likely taken by Mr. Rolfsrud. There are several photographs of abandoned homesteads, the sugar beet factory at Drayton, N.D. and a church at Walhalla, N.D. They also were pasted to paper with written descriptions. For both files the pictures have not been removed from the paper.

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5.1 Young man, by A.P. Holand, Grand Forks, N.D.
5.2 Middle aged man, by Pierce, Leeds, N.D.
5.3 Two young men, by A.P. Holand, Grand Forks, N.D.

Native Americans Series (10)

6.1 Eagle Woman
6.2 Flying Cloud (Frank B. Zahn)
6.3 Crows Heart & Mrs. Sitting Crow busts
6.4 Drags Wolf bust
6.5 Perry Ross, Hanna Fox busts
6.6 Native American in headdress posing with bust and sculptor, Ida Prokop Lee
6.7 Red Tomahawk, by Frank Fiske
6.8 Medicine Rock historic site marker
6.9 Standing Rock reservation sign
6.10 Holy hill of Mandans, Cannonball, N.D.

Geographic File Series (15)

7.1-2 Bismarck: Pioneer Family statue
7.3-4 Devils Lake: North Dakota School for the Deaf building
7.5 Grand Forks: Aakers Business College
7.6 Grassy Butte: Post office
7.7-8 Jamestown: Crippled Children’s Home
7.9 Killdeer Mountains: Medicine Hole
7.10 McKenzie County: Dr. P.O.C. Johnson, Watford City, N.D. in sled
7.11 New Salem: Cow statue
7.12 Pembina: Cavalier Hotel (old and new)
7.13 Red River: Aerial photograph of Red River
7.14 Rugby: Geographic Center monument
7.15 Whitestone Battlefield monument

Topical Files Series

Agriculture (4)

8.1 Cattle drive near Watford City, N.D.
8.2-3 Dust bowl drifts by Bottineau County farm, 1936; and Morton County, Kansas, 1938
8.4 Farmstead and field of wheat shocks, Foxholm, N.D.

Carl Ben Eielson (2)

9.1 Eielson and Sir. Hubert Wilkins by airplane
9.2 Eielson by airplane

Homesteading (6)

10.1 Man doing laundry
10.2 Men on horse in front of house
10.3-4 Family in front of sod house
10.5 Family in front of wood shack
10.6 Man cutting hair of seated man

International Peace Gardens (4)

11.1 Garden scene
11.2-4 Aerials
Marquis de Mores Chateau (6)
12.1 House exterior
12.2-6 Interior views

Thomas McGoey (3)
13.1-2 McGoey seated on airplane
13.3 McGoey flying airplane

Mobile Hearing and Speech Clinic (7)
14.1 Group of children outside trailer
14.2-3 Trailer in front of building and by school
14.4 Trailer in snow
14.5 Testing boy
14.6-7 Teacher and girl

Norwegian Yarn Dolls (5)
15.1-5 Assorted dolls, by unknown artist

Paul Broste Rock Museum, Parshall, N.D. (14)
16.1 Exterior, color
16.2 Interior, color
16.3-14 Interior, black and white

Transportation (3)
17.1 Anson Northrop steamboat
17.2 Stagecoach crossing Little Missouri River
17.3 Great Northern railroad hopper car, grain being tested by two men on top

Tesher Cable Car (2)
18.1-2 Polaroids of cable car over Little Missouri River, N.D.

McKenzie County, N.D. Snapshots Series (6)
19.1 Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Goldsmith, Jesse Anderson, Miss Stebbins and Arthur Lalonde in Badlands, 1911
19.2 Badlands of Little Missouri, Alexander, N.D., 1911
19.3 Log and plaster ranch house
19.4 Miss Florence Stebbins outside her claim shanty in McKenzie County, Alexander, N.D., Sept. 1910 to Dec. 1911
19.5 Alexander, N.D., summer 1910
19.6 View from Florence Stebbins claim shanty at Alexander, N.D., 1911

Red River Land Series (96)
20/1-96 Snapshot images used in *Red River Land*