Finding Aid to the
Thorstina Jackson Walters and Émile Walters Photograph Collection

Walters, Thorstina Jackson, 1887–1959
Thorstina Jackson Walters & Émile Walters photograph collection, 1920s-1950s
476 photographic prints
Collection number: Photo 2010
Mss 630 and Folio 16

OVERVIEW

Links: Finding Aid to the Thorstina and Émile Walters Papers
View collection on Digital Horizons

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

Provenance: Donated by Émile & Thorstina Walters, Poughkeepsie, N.Y, 1956 (Acc. 630).

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

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

BIOGRAPHY

Thorstina Jackson was born to Icelandic immigrants Thorleifur Joakimson Jackson and Gudrún Jónsdóttir in Pembina County, N.D., in 1887. She attended the United College in Winnipeg, Manitoba, earning a degree in modern languages. After completing college, she taught school until after World War I. She went to Germany and France, serving as a social worker. Coming back to the United States, Thorstina completed her post-graduate work at Columbia University in 1924, and from there started her lecture and writing career on Iceland and Icelandic Americans. In 1926 she received the Icelandic Order of the Knights Cross of the Order of the Falcon from King Christian X of Denmark and Iceland for her lectures and studies in Iceland and Icelandic settlements in America. She was also very involved in the
preparations for Iceland’s landmark Millennial Celebration in 1930, and so received the Order of the Millennial Celebration for her efforts.

In 1928 Thorstina Jackson married Émile Walters. After returning to the United States, she was employed by the New York City Department of Welfare as a social worker, and then during World War II worked in the Censorship and War Information Department until 1944, when she had to resign due to multiple sclerosis. The same year, she was awarded a fellowship from the University of Minnesota, which resulted in her book, *Modern Sagas*, published in 1953, on the history of Icelandic settlements in North Dakota. She died on February 2, 1959.

Émile Walters was also born of Icelandic immigrants in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1893. His parents died when he was quite young, resulting in him being raised by foster parents in Gardar, N.D., eventually becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen. He attended the Art Institute in Chicago, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and the Tiffany Foundation. He became a well-known landscape artist, and his work was exhibited in museums in the United States, Canada and England, with some works in permanent collections at the Smithsonian Institution, the Fogg Museum, the National Museum of Iceland, and the University Museum in Bangkok, Thailand. He received the Icelandic Order and the Knight’s Cross of the Order of the Falcon from King Christian X of Denmark and Iceland. He died in 1977.

**SCOPE AND CONTENT**

The Thorstina Jackson Walters photographic collection includes various photographs chronicling the Icelandic American community and their heritage in America. Many of her photographs are taken in Iceland, recording the daily life of the people, the country itself, some of its history, and of Iceland’s Millennial Celebration in 1930. There are numerous portraits of the Icelandic people, Icelandic Americans, and even more specifically, North Dakotans of Icelandic heritage. This collection has been organized into five series: Thorstina Jackson Walters family; the Iceland; the Icelandic American; the Icelandic North Dakotans; and the North Dakota. The photographs were accessioned as part of the Walters papers donated to the Institute and processed as Manuscript 630.

The **Thorstina and Émile Walters Series** (Files 1 through 7) contains photographs of Thorstina and her family; of her husband Emile, and his family; and of the two of them and their final home in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. The file containing the photographs of Thorstina show her as a young girl, growing up through adulthood from her graduation photo to standing in front of her home upon retirement with her husband. This series also has a sample of Émile’s artwork, as he was a relatively well-known artist.

The **Iceland Series** (Files 8 through 61) concentrate on the various aspects of Icelandic life. This encompasses their entertainment (actors & actresses), their artwork (specifically their sculptures and carvings), livestock, farmsteads, the countryside which includes both glaciers and geysers, to the main city of Reykjavik. Of special interest is the photograph sub-series within this series of Iceland’s Millennial Celebration. Dignitaries of the time from Iceland and Denmark, England, the United States and several other countries are shown attending this event. Another photograph of special interest is the signing of the Icelandic Treaty for Independence, signed December 1st, 1929.
The **Icelandic Americans Series** (Files 62 through 88) has photographs of Americans of Icelandic decent. Two notable individuals in this series are Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Steffansson and Dr. Harriet McGraw.

The **North America Series** (Files 89 through 93) contains various photographs of North Dakota in the Icelandic community of Mountain, North Dakota. Of special note is a photograph of the school in Mountain, N.D. where Vilhjalmur Steffansson received his early schooling. There is also a photograph of a school in Saskatchewan and a photographic postcard of sign over entrance to Gimli Park.

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**Iceland Series**

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