

Finding Aid to the Fargo (N.D.) Public Schools Records

Fargo (N.D.) Public Schools

Fargo, N.D. Public Schools Records, 1874-1980

29 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 263

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OVERVIEW

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HISTORY

Fargo, North Dakota has its beginnings with the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railway at the Red River of the North—the boundary between Minnesota and the Territory of Dakota. In 1872 the railroad crossed the river at the present site of Fargo, then called Centralia. With the organization of Fargo Township in 1874, a school mill was passed for the establishment of a school. In May of that year a Miss Gillings was hired at \$45.00 per month to teach the public school. In 1875 the first school house was purchased. As the town's population expanded, the need for additional schools was addressed by the Board of Education. In

1883 a combination grade and high school was built. On March 4, 1885 the Dakota Territory Legislature enacted a bill creating Fargo as an independent school district. The first high school graduating class in 1886 had eight students.

In 1875 the census showed there were 105 children of school age and by 1907 there were 3172. By 1957 there were 10,164 students of school age. From the 1920s to the 1950s a number of rural school districts adjacent to Fargo have been absorbed by Fargo. The administration of the school district is the responsibility of the Board of Education, elected by popular vote; and superintendent of schools. To date there have been fourteen superintendents.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The collection was donated by the Fargo Public Schools. It included photographs which have been organized and processed as Photograph 2002. The Fargo Public School District records have been organized into fourteen series: Board of Education meeting minutes, Memos, Administrative memos, Record of grades, financial records, Monthly reports of students, Superintendent's Office, Publications, Newspaper clippings, Petitions, Legal, History, Schools, and Subject files.

The [Board of Education Meeting Minutes Series](#) is complete from the beginning of the school district in 1874 to 1980. Later minutes were retained at the district offices. The earliest years are recorded in ledgers and later the minutes are typed and bound. The minutes record the official proceedings of the board and their actions. There is no topical index with the minutes.

The [Board of Education Memos Series](#) cover from 1966 to 1980. Later volumes are at school headquarters. They are organized by school year and in a numbered sequence. These memos are directed to the board of education can come from the superintendent, principals and committees within the school district. They cover a broad range of issues for consideration or information for the board of education. This set has no index at the beginning of each volume.

The [Administrative Memos Series](#) cover from 1966 to 1980. They are organized by school year and consecutively numbered (in 1970 there were 407 individual memos). At the front of each volume there is an index by number, date, subject and who initiated the memo. Largely the memos were generated by school staff for internal information use. Likely it was a way for the school administration and board to remain current on events, policies, and meetings in the school district. More recent administrative memos are at school headquarters.

The [Record of Grades Series](#) document students enrolled and grades received for all grades in the public school system. They cover from 1896 to 1916 and are contained in large ledger volumes. They apparently were maintained by the central office from data supplied by individual teachers or school principals. The volumes are organized chronologically and then by public school, giving the name of the student, attendance, class grades and a remarks column that indicates whether graduated, promoted to next grade, held back or withdrew from school.

The [Financial Record Series](#) contains a wide variety of financial related records documenting the operation of the school district. They have been organized into a number of sub-series, including early ledgers and journals, warrant registers (1894-1935), cash books (1883-1922), budget records, energy usage and expenses, and the Teacher Retirement Fund.

The [Monthly Reports of Students Series](#) includes three volumes that cover 1882 to 1899. They provide monthly statistics on student population, including by sex, admitted, transfers, average attendance, tardiness, and absences.

The [Superintendent's Office Series](#) is only a small collection related to this position. It includes a number of "annual" reports presented by the superintendent regarding the district. It is not know if such reports were done on an annual or biennial basis. The correspondence preserved dates only from 1945 to 1940 and then only letters with individuals and companies with names L-Z were preserved. They are primarily routine business matters with vendors, sales people and professional matters.

The [Publications Series](#) reflects the few publications found within the records. They were pulled and developed into this series. Several are early documents related to the rules, regulations and policies of the early school district. There are also a number of more recent items related more to curriculum matters. Of special interest are two early publications, *Course of Study and the Rules and Regulations Approved and Adopted Nov. 10, 1885 by the Board of Education of the City of Fargo* (1885), and *School Laws of the City of Fargo* (1885).

The [Newspaper Clippings Series](#) covers the years from 1962 to 1986 and are a very good source for the activities of the Fargo school board and the schools in general. Most are clippings found in the local newspaper, *The Forum*, although there are some programs, and items issues by individual schools and programs. The early years are not complete but quickly they are more thorough in coverage. Through 1969 the clippings have been placed in scrapbooks. A scrapbook covering 1972-April 1977 and loose scrapbook pages covering 1969-1971 was accessioned later through the district's central library processing office. Thereafter they are loose, in general chronological order. Most, if not all, of these clippings were compiled by long-time school board member Mrs. Ray Miller. The second run of clippings, 1959-1976, is very incomplete and likely was compiled by another person. No attempt was made to integrate these into the main collection.

The [Petitions Series](#) reflects a variety of issues for which the public presented to the Fargo Board of Education. They have been organized by school, if appropriate, and the specific issue involved. Most of them date from the 1920s and involve new schools, additions, changes in the grades in particular schools, and even a request to teach the Norwegian language at the high school level.

The [Legal Series](#) contains various documents and correspondence related to a number of legal cases involving the school district. Quite a number related to injuries, and even death, on playground equipment. The most involved is the case regarding long-time elementary teacher Ina Johnson who was removed from her position in the 1930s in a dispute with the superintendent and school board. There were petitions presented by parents for her reinstatement in 1942 and later in 1952 in order that she could qualify for retirement benefits.

The [History Series](#) reflects the number of historical writings found in the collection related to the history and development of the school district. There are also original copies of early school district rules and regulations. Perhaps the most unique documents are the certified copies of the Dakota Territorial Legislature' bills establishing the school district in 1883 and the 1885 bill amending the school district charter.

The [Schools Series](#) is arranged alphabetically by the name of the Fargo school. This series was part of the original order in the records, although some additions were made to the series from records scattered throughout the collection. The contents span a wide variety of topics and date primarily from the 1910s to the early 1930s. They include contracts, correspondence and specifications for the construction of several of the schools, including much about the building of Central High School in the late 1910s. Other files contain reports of activities, petitions, and general correspondence. Of particular note are the original supply order stubs for the construction of the 1883 high school building, and quite complete files on the operation of the Fargo Nursery School from 1937 to 1965.

The [Subject Files Series](#) reflect documents that could not be placed in any other series. The user should consult the container listing for specific holdings. Of note is a long run of school census statistics from 1919 to 1959 and several early scrapbooks related to the school district. There is also an interesting scrapbook documenting the activities of the Central High School Radio Club from 1928 to 1963.

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