

Finding Aid to the Henry R. Martinson Papers

Martinson, Henry R., 1883–1981

Henry R. Martinson Papers, 1902-1961

.2 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 30

[Biography](#)

[Scope and Content](#)

[Box and Folder List](#)

OVERVIEW

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

Provenance: Donated by Henry R. Martinson, Fargo, N.D., 1953, 1961 (Acc. 129).

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

Copyrights: The copyright is not held by the Institute for Regional Studies.

Citation: [Identification of item]. Henry R. Martinson Papers, Ms 30, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

BIOGRAPHY

Henry R. Martinson was born March 6, 1883 at Minneapolis, Minnesota, the son of Norwegian immigrants Gilbert C. and Catherine Martinson. Shortly after his birth the family moved to Sacred Heart, Minnesota where Henry grew up. He attended the local schools and in 1905 graduated from the School of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota. In 1906 Henry and two friends went to northwestern North Dakota near Bonetrail to homestead with only Henry staying. But, unable to raise money for equipment, Henry moved to Minot where he became a painter and decorator, a trade which he had learned from his father. There, his interest in politics was awakened and he became an active member in the Socialist Party of North Dakota in 1908. He later became editor of its newspaper *The Iconoclast* until the party went

broke in 1916. The rise of the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota, picking socialist ideas, saw the demise of the Socialist Party. By 1918 Henry being broke joined the League as an organizer, working in North Dakota and Minnesota until 1919. In 1920 he taught at the Crookston, Minnesota Agriculture School and in 1921 he moved to Fargo where he worked as a painter. In 1932 and 1933, Mr. Martinson was a W.P.A. adult education instructor and also the supervisor from 1933 to 1934. In 1937 he became Deputy Commissioner of the North Dakota Department of Agriculture and Labor, an office he held until 1965. He then moved back to Fargo maintaining his interest in the labor movement by being Recording Secretary for the Fargo-Moorhead Trade and Labor Assembly, of which he was a past president, and a business representative for the Fargo painter's union.

Politics was not Henry's only interest. He wrote poetry, was business manager for the North Dakota poetry magazine *Prairie Wings*, and in 1967 was named Fargo's honorary poet laureate. Henry also published several magazine articles and books including *Old Trails and New* (1958), *Comes the Revolution* (1969), *History of North Dakota Labor* (1970), *Village Commune Barefoot Boy* (1976), and *135 Funny Stories*. In addition, he has been an active member in the Sons of Norway since 1920. In the 1970s an interest was taken in Henry Martinson's active career and involvement with the Socialist Party and Nonpartisan League. The results were four movies in which Martinson was involved. They include *Prairie Fire* (1976), *Northern Lights* (1979), *Survivor* (1980), and *Rebel Earth* (1980).

Mr. Martinson married Melba L. Mitchell, a Lyon Mountain, New York native, born June 20, 1883. She was a musician and also active in the musician's union. She died in Bismarck on April 1, 1958. He died at Fargo November 20, 1981, and buried at Bismarck, N.D.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The **Henry R. Martinson Papers** is a collection of diverse material documenting his life and involvement in the Socialist Party. The biographical material is a variety of newspaper clippings on Mr. Martinson's life. The papers have been arranged in four series: Correspondence, *Comes the Revolution* manuscript, Socialist Party of North Dakota, and Subject files.

The [Correspondence File Series](#) consists of only several letters including from the Socialist Party of North Dakota, William Ballou, Grace Brown Putnam, Henry G. Teigan, Committee for Honest Science, and Leonard Sackett of the Institute.

The [Comes the Revolution Manuscript Series](#) is a seventy-two page typed copy written by Mr. Martinson documenting the history of the Socialist Party of North Dakota. It appears very similar if not exactly as published in *North Dakota History* and later as a monograph.

The [Socialist Party of North Dakota Series](#) contains remnant pieces of party material, including one meeting minutes, a ballot, and a financial report of July 1916.

The [Subject Files Series](#) contain a variety of material including a pamphlet, "A Socialist Constitution for North Dakota," several of his membership cards in the Socialist Party of America, and a copy of *Socialist Songs with Music* by Charles H. Kerr (1902). In the General file are copies of several of his poems

including *The Old Breed Trail* that was printed with illustrations. There is a copy of *A North Dakota Song* for which Mr. Martinson wrote the words, the music was by his wife Melba. Finally there is part of a resolution related to his career.

SEPARATION RECORDS

The following photographs have been removed from the Henry R. Martinson papers and processed as Photo 30.

Photographs (Institute Photo Mss 30)

- 4 items - Mr. Martinson and wife, with L. L. Griffith, and his model T Ford used in signing up members to the NPL

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Biographical material, and Finding aid
	Correspondence Series
1/2	1917, 1937 - 1938, 1961
	Manuscript Series
	<i>Comes the Revolution</i> manuscript
1/3	pages 1 – 30
1/4	pages 31 – 72
	Socialist Party of North Dakota Series
1/5	Executive Committee meeting minutes, March 17, 1912
1/6	Member's individual ballot
1/7	Secretary's reports, 1916
	Subject Files Series
1/8	General
1/9	"A Socialist Constitution for North Dakota"
1/10	Socialist Party of America - Membership cards, 1908, 1912
1/11	Socialist Songs with Music, 1902