

Finding Aid to the Walter D. Powell Papers

Powell, Walter D., 1869-1959

Walter D. Powell Papers, 1901-1959

.6 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 244

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

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

Provenance: Donated by Mrs. Florence (Powell) Wellhausen, 1969 (Acc. 1730).

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BIOGRAPHY

Walter Dunning Powell was born at Vinton, Iowa, April 14, 1869. His family moved to Dakota Territory in 1883 and in 1900 Mr. Powell moved to Casselton, North Dakota. In 1905 he went to Fargo where he had an insurance business and then in 1915 to Jud, North Dakota where he established a store, later becoming a shoe salesman. In 1924 he was elected secretary of the North Dakota Retail Merchants Association, a post he held 15 years. He served as chairman of the legislative committee of United Commercial Travelers and in this role developed the Absentee Voter's Measure which was adopted by most states. For this achievement, the Fargo Council of United Commercial Travelers made him an honorary member. In 1923 he was given a patent on an automobile tag he invented. Mr. Powell was very interested in early history and archaeology and in May 1936, discovered a Mandan Village near

Menoken, believed to be that visited by La Verendrye in 1738. This site is now a state park. He also discovered a fortified village 40 miles west of Fargo, at Maple Creek, believed to be of Mandan Indians.

Mr. Powell was married in Chicago in 1894 or 1895 to Maggie DeBus, born December 2, 1871 in Menomonie, Wisconsin. They had 3 children, Florence, Walter Jr., and Raymond. Mrs. Powell died October 9, 1942 and Mr. Powell died April 16, 1959. Both are buried in the Casselton Cemetery. Mr. Powell was a member of Shiloh Masonic Lodge, York Rite bodies and El Zagal Temple of the Shrine, of Fargo. He was also a member of the North Dakota State Historical Society since 1900.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Walter D. Powell Papers contain three series: Correspondence, Manuscripts and Subject files. Arranged chronologically, the [Correspondence Series](#) deals mainly with Mr. Powell's interest in history, and is both incoming and outgoing. Included is correspondence with Charles Haas, John Davis, Hjalmar Holand, Martin Kavanaugh, Rev. D'Eschombault of St. Boniface College, Orlin Oium, Esther Burnett Horne, Harry Lynn, Roy Johnson, the St. Louis Library, and the Alexandria, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce (1937-1958).

In the [Manuscripts Series](#) are numerous works on explorers including Alexander Henry, David Thompson, Lewis and Clark, and La Verendrye. There are also writings on Sakakawea, and a great deal on the Mandan Indians and their connections with La Verendrye (1738) and the Vikings (1362). There is his unpublished manuscript, *The Master*, which is a history of the Earth.

The [Subject Files Series](#) includes a quite a number of booklets, programs, and articles related to his historical research. There are articles on the rock, jasper, and copper artifacts among the Indians, a description of a trip east in 1947, and on a visit to Sioux City, South Dakota (1947). Also included is a story on Fort Yates, and a radio address on behalf of the Retail Merchant's Association. In the subject files is a 1901 copy of the *Wisconsin Archaeologist* concerning Indian artifacts, and also booklets, *The Story of Mario's Pass* and *San Francisco*. Some booklets on explorers include *Hudson Bay to the Blackfoot Country* about Anthony Hendry and Andrew Cocking, *Wearing the Crown of Thorns in Trois-Rivieres*, about Canadian explorers, *The Verendrye Overland Quest of the Pacific*, *A Glance at the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, and *Some Verendrye Enigmas* by Orin G. Libby. There is also a copy of the *Minnesota Archaeologist* with articles on La Verendrye (1936), including one by Powell. There are some notebooks on explorations, items concerning North Dakota Retail Merchants, including a bill, pamphlets and articles concerning business, a patent on an automobile tag system (1923), and some hand drawn maps on La Verendrye's explorations. The political material includes a 1929 speech to the Legislature by Gov. Shafer and items on the 1952 presidential election. There are also newspaper clippings concerning La Verendrye, the Mandan Villages, Sakakawea, and Gen. Custer.

SEPARATIONS RECORD

The following items have been removed from the Walter Powell Papers and sent to the section indicated.

Books (Library book collection, consult catalog for call number and location.)

- *Warroad and the Lake of the Woods Area*
- *The Sibley House 1835-1935, The One Hundredth Anniversary of the Sibley Homestead, 1935*
- *The Autobiography of an Engine* (The Willian Crooks).
- *Pierre Gaultier Varennes, sieur de La Verendrye; the discovery of the Rocky Mountains, 1933*

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder Contents

1/1 Biographical information, and Finding aid

1/2 **Correspondence, 1937-1958**

Manuscripts Series

1/3 Alexander Henry - 1806
 1/4 Copper artifacts
 1/5 David Thompson and the Mandan Indians
 1/6 Fort Yates; "A Visit to Sioux Falls"
 1/7 "Jasper, Rock of the Ages," and "A Trip East, 1947"
 1/8 Lewis and Clark in 1804
 1/9 The Mandan Indians and the Vikings
 1/10 The Mandan Indians and the Menoken Site
 1/11 The Mandan Indians, where they came from
 1/12 *The Master*, chapters I-IV
 1/13 *The Master*, chapters V-VII
 1/14 Radio address by Powell, for Retail Merchants
 1/15 Sakakawea, with Lewis and Clark
 1/16 La Verendrye and the Mandan Indians, 1738
 1/17 La Verendrye and the Mandan Indians, 1738
 1/18 La Verendrye - the Discovery of the Rocky Mountains
 1/19 La Verendrye in North Dakota, 1738
 1/20 La Verendrye in North Dakota, 1738
 1/21 La Verendrye - Summing Up the Evidence Presented

Subject Files Series

2/1 Booklets and programs - historical
 2/2 Booklets and postcards - general
 2/3 Booklets - Explorers, 1600-1800
 2/4 Maps – La Verendrye and Mandan Indians
 2/5 *Minnesota Archaeologist*, 1936
 2/6 Newspaper clippings, 1936-1957
 2/7 North Dakota Retail Merchants Association

2/8	Notebooks - Lewis and Clark, Sakakawea
2/9	Notebooks – La Verendrye, David Thompson
2/10	Patent on “Method and means for the registration of motor vehicles,” 1923
2/11	Political material, 1929, 1952