

Finding Aid to the Reverend Eben E. Saunders Collection

Saunders, Eben E., 1849-1928

Eben E. Saunders Collection, 1914-1926

.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 61

[Biography](#)

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OVERVIEW

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

Provenance: Compiled and indexed by David Palonaki, 1981 - 1982.

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Citation: [Identification of item]. Reverend Eben E. Saunders Collection, MS 61, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

BIOGRAPHY

Eben Ezer Saunders was born at Maidstone, Kent, England on January 7, 1849, the son of William and Mary (Grigsby) Saunders. In 1851 the family emigrated to the United States, settling at Brandon, Michigan. There Mr. Saunders was educated and later taught school in Saginaw County, Michigan. Other employments were as a colporteur of the American Tract Society, Marquette Railway telegraph operator and an agent and manager of the Western Union office in Saginaw.

In 1883 Mr. Saunders became a missionary of the American Sunday School Union in Michigan. Mr. Saunders was married to Grace F. McKland at Saginaw, Michigan on January 19, 1870 and to whom two daughters were born, Nettie Lillian and Olive Laura. Mrs. Saunders died in 1887 whereupon Mr. Saunders in 1888 moved to Fargo, North Dakota leaving his daughters in Michigan. In North Dakota Mr.

Saunders was the syndical Sunday School missionary of the Presbyterian Board of Education, a position he held until 1891 when he was ordained a Congregational minister at Wahpeton, North Dakota. Thereupon he represented the Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society and Congregational Home Missionary Society. Rev. Saunders also served various North Dakota pastorates of the Congregational Church from 1891 to 1914. During this period he was involved in the publication of several newspapers and a magazine. He was a staunch supporter of prohibition, being active in the Prohibition and Farmers Alliance Parties. In addition he was a very active member of the Independent Order of Good Templars in Michigan.

In 1914 Rev. Saunders became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church at Mapleton. Even after moving to Fargo to retire in 1917 he continued to serve the First Presbyterian Church at Sharon, North Dakota. Rev. Saunders during this period became very active in historical research and writing which resulted in numerous published articles in the local newspapers concerning North Dakota and especially the Red River Valley. He also served for a number of years until his death as General Secretary of the Red River Valley Old Settlers Association.

On May 23, 1889 Rev. Saunders married Margaret Etta Shaver of Mapleton, North Dakota. She was born at Oroquois, Ontario, Canada on May 27, 1852 and came to Mapleton in 1887 to her sister Mrs. Ralph Weir. She was active in the state Women's Home Missionary Society and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Rev. and Mrs. Saunders had two children, Henry and John.

Mrs. Saunders died on August 26, 1924 and Rev. Saunders on November 13, 1928. Both are buried at Mapleton, North Dakota.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Rev. Eben E. Saunders collection was assembled by an Institute staff member, David Palomaki, in 1982. The various newspaper series were accidently discovered on the microfilm copies of the Fargo Forum and Courier-News newspapers. Further investigation about Rev. Saunders and his writings indicated very little was available in other local collections or publications. A collection of his papers was found to have been deposited at the State Historical Society of North Dakota. Although totally unorganized, the collection was loaned to the Institute where copies were made of all his writings, correspondence and autobiographical material. Thus over ninety per cent of this collection has been copied from that collection. Addition material came from other Institute collections. Very likely our collection is not complete for all of Rev. Saunders' writings.

The Saunders Collection is a rich historical collection of material relating to the early settlement period of North Dakota, particularly the Red River Valley. As General Secretary of the Red River Valley Old Settlers Association (RRVOSA) for a number of years, Mr. Saunders had access to the historical data collected by the Association but which is now lost. This Collection has been organized alphabetically by the series title or subject of his writings with biographical and correspondence files as well.

The [Biographical File](#) includes autobiographical articles, census extract and obituaries for Rev. and Mrs. Saunders.

The [Correspondence Series](#) consists of copies of scattered letters dating from 1914 to 1916. There are four letters from Elizabeth Preston Anderson all concerning suffrage and the North Dakota W.C.T.U., a letter from Governor Lynn Frazier requesting membership in the RRVOSA; letters to H.W. Byerly, General Immigration Agent for the Northern Pacific Railway; T.N. Putnam; and several letters he wrote

for publication in the Fargo Forum including one concerning James 14. Foley, poet-laureate of North Dakota.

The remainder of the collection consists [of Rev. Saunders' Writings](#) which were mainly published in the Fargo Forum and Courier-News in serial format. The Barrie Community file consists of two newspaper articles on the "early history and development of the Barrie Community" which was located on the Sheyenne River in Richland County. The "Bits of North Dakota History" series, which is complete, was published from August 1922 to April 1923 in the Fargo newspaper Courier-News on almost a daily basis. As the title indicates each article is composed of many short historical pieces on very specific subjects, all related to North Dakota history. A table of contents has been prepared for all. Rev. Saunders also did a three-part series on the "Story of Congregationalism in North Dakota", two articles on the early history of Eddy County and New Rockford, North Dakota; and a seven-part series on the "Early History of Farmers' Alliance in North Dakota."

Possibly the major newspaper serial published by Rev. Saunders was his "[Historical Letters](#)." There were a total of 119 such numbered items published between September 1914 and January 1917 on a weekly basis in the Fargo Forum. Our collection is incomplete with 25 missing and 10 incomplete, although there is a complete list available in the collection. Each "Letter" is devoted to one subject. They cover many topics but especially prominent are articles on prohibition, religious groups, North Dakota Sunday School Association and various county and community historical items.

The [Historical and Religious Writings File](#) contains various items including on the Lutheran Church in the Red River Valley, Methodism in North Dakota, Presbyterianism at Pembina, North Dakota, early days in Moorhead, and the "First meeting of Masons held in State in 1863." The Independent Dakotan was a monthly magazine devoted to temperance and prohibition and edited by Rev. Saunders. We have a copy (possibly incomplete) of the September 1894 (Vol. 3, No. 3) issue.

The "[North Dakota Builders' Series](#)" was published in the Fargo Forum from May to June 1918 which was brief biographical sketches of "people who have had to do with the early settlement and development of the territory and state of North Dakota." This collection is complete and an index to the series has been compiled.

The "[Story of Presbyterianism in North Dakota' Series](#)" consists of eight articles. Also included in this file is another article on early Presbyterianism in North Dakota. The series was published in the Fargo Daily Courier-News in 1916.

The "[Red River and North Dakota Pioneers' Series](#)" was a short lived series in the Courier-News from February to April 1921. It consisted of photographs of pioneers along with short biographical sketches. The Red River Valley Old Settlers Association consists of several of its letterheads and a biographical membership form filled out by John O. Christianson.

The "[Those Pioneers' Series](#)" was another major serial publication of Rev. Saunders. It was published in the Courier-News from July 1918 to December 1919 on almost a daily basis. Each article has three to five short biographical sketches mentioning when and where they came to North Dakota. Our collection is complete. Rev. Saunders also published a five-part series on Traill County, North Dakota ("Some Early Traill County History") in the Hillsboro Banner. The Miscellaneous writings file includes an item on when potatoes first made the Red River Valley famous, two "Jaunts over the State" articles, and one titled "North Dakota Pioneers," concerning Judson A. Wright.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Biographical material and Register
	Correspondence Series
1/2	1914 - 1926
	Writings Series
1/3	Barrie Community
	"Bits of North Dakota History"—
1/4	August - October 1922
1/5	November December 1922
1/6	January February 1923
1/7	March - April 1923
1/8	Congregationalism history in North Dakota,-1916
1/9	Eddy County and New Rockford history
1/10	Farmers' Alliance history in North Dakota, 1917 - 1918
	"Historical Letters"—
1/11	Numbers 1 40; September 1914 - June 19, 1915
1/12	Numbers 41 80; June 26, 1915 - April 1, 1916
1/13	Numbers 81 119; April 8, 1916 - January 2, 1917
14	Historical writing - Religion and general, 1916 - 1921
15	Independent Dakotan, September 1894
16	Miscellaneous, 1922
17	"North Dakota Builders," 1918
18	North Dakota Sunday School Association, 1890 - 1914
19	Presbyterianism history in North Dakota, 1916, 1920
20	"Red River and North Dakota Pioneers," 1921
21	Red River Valley Old Settlers Association
	"Those Pioneers "—
22	July 1918 - May 1919
23	June 1919 - December 1919
24	Undated
25	Trail County - "Some Early Trail County History," 1921
26	Writings – Miscellaneous