

## Finding Aid to William Sherman's French Settlement in North Dakota Collection

**Sherman, William C. (William Charles), 1927-**

French Settlement in North Dakota Collection, 1890s-2003

.6 linear feet

Collection number: Mss 335

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### OVERVIEW

**Links:** [Finding Aid to Sherman's Jewish Settlement in North Dakota Collection](#)

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**Citation:** [Identification of item]. William C. Sherman, French Settlement in North Dakota Collection, MS 335, Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo

### BIOGRAPHY

William C. Sherman was born in July 8, 1927 at Detroit, Michigan. He attended school in Oregon, Hankinson, N.D. and Lidgerwood, N.D., and graduated from St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn. He attended St. John's School of Theology and graduated in 1955. He served parishes in Verona, Grand Forks, and Enderlin, N.D., and also the Newman Center at North Dakota State University. In 1965 he received a master's degree in sociology from the University of North Dakota and also further study at North Dakota State University from 1966 to 1968. He began teaching at NDSU in 1970 in the area of rural sociology. He retired from NDSU as professor emeritus. He now lives in Grand Forks, N.D.

Father Sherman has done extensive research and writing on the ethnic dimensions of the Northern Great Plains. Among his major works are *Prairie Mosaic: An Ethnic Atlas of Rural North Dakota* (1983); *Plains Folk*, co-edited with Playford Thorson (1988). *Scattered Steeples: Historical Essays Concerning the Diocese of Fargo*, co-edited with Jerry Lamb and Jerry Ruff (1988 and 2006); *African-Americans in North Dakota*, with Thomas Newgard (1994); *Prairie peddlers: the Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota*, with Paul Whitney and John Guerrero (2002); *Valerian Paczek: priest, soldier, quiet hero*, with John Guerrero (2004), and *Wagons North: Minnesota to Oregon*, with John Guerrero (2009).

## HISTORY

The great majority of the French in North America are descended from the colony of New France along the St. Lawrence River, presently the Canadian province of Quebec. In relatively recent times, many of them have moved down into New England to find jobs in factories, but earlier, those who moved generally moved west. French fur traders plied their canoes across the Great Lakes and through the northern forest rivers, reaching the great American prairie west of the Red River of the North. Many of these French fur traders, the voyageurs, quickly took up with Indian women, sometimes by marriage, sometimes just by convenience. The offspring of these couplings were half French, half Indian, and were known by the French word *metí*, deriving from the verb *metir*, or older *mestir*, meaning “to mix.” (*Mestizo* is formed from the same latinate base in Spanish.) The *meti* accepted that name, but more often called themselves *michif*.

Until the boundary realignment in 1818, the whole Red River valley belonged to Great Britain. The Louisiana Purchase included everything drained into the Missouri-Mississippi system, which left out the Red, flowing north to Hudson’s Bay and the Arctic Ocean. This schema left some of what is now North Dakota and Minnesota in British North America, and part of what is now southern Alberta and Saskatchewan in the United States. British and American diplomats agreed to “straighten” the border by running it straight west from Lake of the Woods along the forty-ninth parallel to the Rocky Mountains, and, subsequently, to the Pacific. During the British period, the upper Red River was an undivided territory all the way to Lake Winnipeg. There were many French settlers on what later became the American side of the border as well as on the British side. There were also a number of Scots, brought in by Lord Selkirk to give a new start to Scots highlanders displaced by the clearances in the northern Scotland. Even after the boundary was changed, many French Canadians and French-Indian *metis* stayed on the United States side of the border.

The *metis* and some pure French people tended to congregate in certain parts of the state. They were in strength where the Red enters Canada around Pembina and Walhalla, also south to the Grand Forks area, then into northwest Minnesota, especially in the Red Lake Falls area. The French-Indians also created a major grouping around the Turtle Mountains in north central North Dakota adjoining the Canadian border. There were a few early French settlers in the area immediately south and west of Fargo, North Dakota. These were the major concentrations, with individuals scattered about the state

(History by Graef Gannon, processor of this collection)

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

One of Father Bill Sherman's chief interests was to compile documentation about the early settlers of what became North Dakota, their particular ethnic roots, and information about their history and culture. One of the ethnic groups studied by Father Sherman was people of French origin and background. French North Dakotans were a small but not negligible part of the North Dakota community. This collection related to the French Settlement in North Dakota was compiled by Father Sherman over the years of his career. It has been organized into two series: Subjects and Locations. Some of the files in both series contain well-printed booklets, brochures, and maps.

The **Subjects File Series** includes some newspaper clippings, some personal memoirs, and a great number of note papers written by Father Sherman used to jot down information on the topic, done over many years. Most of the note papers have been gathered into a single file, exceptions being sheets that clearly belonged under one of the subject headings, though even this sorting only has been done cursorily. The Chippewa and Cree file contains an excellent map of the French communities.

The **Location Series** contains information related to the connection between French settlers and a specific geographic location in North Dakota, Manitoba, Canada and Minnesota.

## BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box/Folder	Contents
1/1	Finding aid
	Subjects Series
1/2	French Canada, French in the United States, French generally
1/3	The fur trade
1/4	Catholic priests among the French in North Dakota
1/5	Chippewa and Cree
1/6	Metís
1/7	Jotted notes
1/8	Miscellaneous area notes
	Locations Series
1/9	Bottineau, N.D.
1/10	Grand Forks, N.D.
1/11	Minnesota French Canadians
1/12	Oakwood, N.D.
1/13	Old Menard (This is a person, not a location)

1/14 Olga, Walhalla, N.D.  
2/1 Pembina, N.D.  
2/2 St. Boniface, Manitoba  
2/3 Tarsus  
2/4 Turtle Mountains, N.D.  
2/5 Wild Rice, N.D.